

Introduction

More than two centuries ago, the great English historian Edward Gibbon summed up John of Brienne's life with the typically rotund observation that 'it was only in the age of chivalry, that valour could ascend from a private station to the thrones of Jerusalem and Constantinople'.¹ Whatever one may think of Gibbon's judgement here, John (d. 1237) had one of the most remarkable careers in the entire medieval period. He started out as a relatively obscure figure – spending his early years, perhaps, in a monastic environment before going on to be a knight. In due course he rose to become king of Jerusalem, ruling, in fact, mainly from Acre in the Holy Land. Subsequently, he even topped that rank by becoming Latin emperor of Constantinople. Born to neither, he was the only individual who ever wore both of these, the highest-ranking and most prestigious crowns in the Latin East (albeit consecutively, not simultaneously). In addition, at various junctures in his career he either genuinely went for – or else was wrongly believed to have tried to acquire – a quite astonishing number of other crowns too. This list contains several eye-opening entries: the Armenian kingdom in Cilicia; León in modern Spain; the city of Damietta, in Egypt; Lombardy; even England.

But there is much more to John than an aristocratic opportunist, always on the hunt for a throne. For instance, he is still sometimes presented as a kind of 'heroic geriatric', who achieved his first crown at the quite unbelievably advanced age of around sixty. That is undoubtedly mistaken. It *is* true, though, that his illustrious monarchical career was confined to the latter half of his life. Moreover, over the course of his career as a whole, he obtained a remarkable string of other titles, offices and posts as well. These included: leader of the Fifth Crusade (1217–21); commander in the 'War of the Keys' against his own son-in-law, the emperor and excommunicated crusader Frederick II; count(-regent) of his own

¹ E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, introd. D. Womersley, 6 vols. (London, 1997 [1776–88]), VI, ch. 61.

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ancestral Brienne in Champagne; and rector of the Tuscan Patrimony in the Papal State.

This extraordinary acquisitive life has been touched on by many commentators concerned, above all, with the crusades and the Latin East in the early thirteenth century. Sadly, such subjects retain some relevance for today's world. Until now, though, John himself has languished as a topic of historical enquiry. He has not been properly reassessed for more than seventy years. His unique career calls out for comprehensive re-examination, both in its own right and to open up novel angles on what produced it – namely, a range of crucially important structures and processes, connecting the heartlands of the thirteenth-century Latin West and its frontiers.

This book is a biographical study: a reconstruction and contextualisation of John's career, using it as the starting point to investigate much more. It is worth admitting, at the outset, that the very notion of 'medieval biography' can still come under serious attack to this day. It is all too easy to declare it to be simply impossible, given the nature and scope of the available source material.² But that is no reason for not pushing, as far as we can, in the direction of biography; and, when this fails, we can still reach for prosopography (that is, a collective though more limited 'biography', looking for common features in a given group). We come back to a fundamental point: in the medieval world, the outlook and activities of leading figures were very often dictated by personal and familial motives. This is particularly the case with aristocrats 'on the make', such as John. People such as him, and dynasties such as the Briennes, require detailed treatment in personal and dynastic terms so that they can be properly understood. Such biographical-prosopographical approaches have become increasingly popular over the course of recent years.³ As will be seen, John's career is exceptionally episodic, which makes this method of study particularly fruitful.

A proper reassessment of John's career permits a much better understanding of the complex interplay between the Latin West and East in the early thirteenth century. To be a little bit more precise: this book focuses on the critical gap *after* the reshaping of the Latin East in 1187–1204, to include the start of the epoch of the great cross-Mediterranean dynastic agglomerations of Frederick II and Charles of Anjou (that is, from the middle of the 1220s onwards). The period between these dates is one that

² For further discussion of medieval biography, see D. Bates, J. Crick and S. Hamilton, eds., *Writing Medieval Biography, 750–1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow* (Woodbridge, 2006); and W. M. Aird, *Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy, c.1050–1134* (Woodbridge, 2008).

³ See G. Beech, 'Prosopography', in J. M. Powell, ed., *Medieval Studies: An Introduction* (New York, 1992), 185–226.

historians have long found somewhat amorphous and hard to categorise. In fact, as we will discover, John's reign as king of Jerusalem is an important marker on the road that led to these agglomerations.⁴

After 1187 the crusading 'movement' quickly approached its zenith. It was considered essential to recover the holy city of Jerusalem, and so restore its *raison d'être* to the eponymous rump kingdom. Although the Third Crusade failed to achieve this, it did help cement one crucial development. Several Western great powers became much more consistently interested and powerful in the Latin East than they had ever been beforehand. Although it is discussed at length in this book, it is worth emphasising here the special role of the papacy. Pope Innocent III may be described as the chief architect of the Mediterranean world that the Briennes burst onto in the first decade of the thirteenth century. Thanks largely to him, the papacy swiftly became much better at promoting and sustaining its protégés, such as John, even when the individuals in question were far away. John's career may even be categorised as a product of Innocent's pontificate. In sum, it is not easily conceivable without the pope's earlier work. This perspective buttresses the view that John's career reflects a period of noteworthy transformation, during which new ways were opening up to pursue personal and dynastic advantage.

The highest-ranking Latin Eastern leaders were the king of what was left of the kingdom of Jerusalem, and – after the climax of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 – the Latin emperor of newly conquered Constantinople. These two naturally sought to assert their positions as leaders in their respective Latin Eastern spheres, fit to rank with their monarchical contemporaries in the West. But the latter goal, at least, consistently eluded them. The Holy Places, City and Land were charged with enormous religio-emotional cachet throughout Latin Christendom. In marked contrast, though, the international status of the king and the earthly realm of Jerusalem were actually quite modest (a lesson, this, in how substantially the same object could be conceived of in two very different ways). For its part, nothing in or about the Latin empire of Constantinople could ever come close to holy Jerusalem's resonance and appeal in the West, for all the 'post-Byzantine' imperial rhetoric that the Latin emperors desperately deployed. In short, although the thrones of Constantinople and, in particular, Jerusalem were conspicuous, they could only really be regarded as inferior when compared to the great polities of the West.

John's career provides the best opportunity we have to compare and contrast both the crowns and realms of Jerusalem and Constantinople,

⁴ Below, 50.

since we can observe the same individual ruling in each, albeit at different times. (This, in turn, enables us to say rather more, especially about John's reign as Latin emperor.) It is remarkable how little has been done to make such comparisons, or, indeed, to look at the links between the kingdom of Jerusalem and the Latin empire. There is a research project here for an aspiring doctoral student.

One way that Western powers had long been influential in the Latin East was through taking advantage of – and, when possible, directing – the contemporaneous 'aristocratic diaspora'. This label of Bartlett's refers to Western aristocrats 'on the make' in regions far afield from their original homelands. This is something that can be seen not just on the frontiers of Latin Christendom but also in its heartlands, a point exemplified by the Briennes themselves.⁵ This, in short, is a fascinating concept, crying out for refinement – something that can be done only by looking at how it played out in practice.

Probing a little further into the diaspora, it is possible to identify several themes within it that are particularly applicable to John. For a start, he himself can be categorised as a 'not quite first-rank' figure.⁶ This book explores the implications of that echelon's social and geographical mobility. In short, it examines the interface between 'Frankish/French' provincial dynasticism and power, on the one hand, and elite politics at a higher level, on the other. Turning to a second, quite separate theme: over the course of the central Middle Ages, various Western lords were 'parachuted into' the Latin East as expedient leaders in periods of dynastic and/or military insecurity. John himself was a relative outsider twice selected, 'parachuted in' and propped up, largely from the West, to try to work power structures in the East that were essentially beyond his control. Whilst there could be a range of threats to such newcomers' positions, the most obvious is dynastic failure or misfortune. This was what destroyed all John's efforts to sire a line of Brienne rulers in the Latin East. In the end, he was the one and only Brienne king, in clear contrast to, say, the contemporary Lusignan family. However, such rulers and ex-rulers could become 'crown men': attractive prospects for other Latin realms in similar troubled situations. Certainly, this is a good label for John, and it also works, in a slightly different way, for his predecessor Aimery of Lusignan, king of Cyprus and then of Jerusalem too (d. 1205).

⁵ For the concept, see R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London, 1994), 5–59.

⁶ This phrase is adapted from H. E. Mayer, *The Crusades*, tr. J. Gillingham, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1988), 243.

To investigate these themes properly, it is necessary to look, at least *en passant*, at a variety of other individuals, families and networks. A number of common threads can be found connecting the Briennes and, for example, the Montlhérys and the Montforts.⁷ Likewise, the longevity of John's military career, and his meteoric climb up the social scale, put him in the rarefied company of contemporaries such as William Marshal, the knight who rose from tournament fields to become ruler of England (d. 1219).⁸ But by far the most judicious comparison to make is not simply with the Lusignans, but with one member of that family in particular: another of John's predecessors, Guy, king of Jerusalem and then lord of Cyprus in the 1180s and 1190s. Guy and John are repeatedly compared as this book proceeds. Likewise, the book examines the sources for vital clues as to what contemporaries were really looking for from people such as John. Admittedly, these notions can be at odds with modern assumptions about the geopolitical realities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and about the resources necessary to meet those demands. Yet contemporary expectations – whatever we choose to think of them – are fundamental to understanding a career 'on the make' such as John's.

The succouring of the Latin East – above all, of Jerusalem – was regarded as the ultimate enterprise for the entire Latin world. In practice, though, the running in the Latin East could often be made by discrete groups that hailed from specific regions in the West. When we are seeking to explain John's 'implantation' as ruler into two successive, quite different Latin Eastern environments – that is, the kingdom of Jerusalem and the Latin empire – it is crucial to note that, at the time, there were well-placed 'clusters' of his fellow Champenois in both. Each cluster could well have played a decisive part in bringing about John's accession in its realm, and then in sustaining his regime. But this 'cluster factor' was probably more significant on the earlier of the two occasions: John's first great step-up, to become king of Jerusalem. Crucially, this development does seem to have been promoted by the regent of Champagne herself, Countess Blanche (regent 1201–22). All this leads towards an important point: during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries – part of the zenith of the 'crusading movement' – Champagne loomed much larger across the Latin East as a whole than has often been recognised.

Throughout his reigns in the Latin East, John remained very close to – in some instances, even reliant on – certain Western great powers. In short, he

⁷ For the former comparison, see J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders, 1095–1131* (Cambridge, 1997), 169–95.

⁸ For William Marshal's career, see D. Crouch, *William Marshal: Knighthood, War and Chivalry, 1147–1219*, 2nd edn (London, 2002).

was a ‘not-quite-first-rank’ figure who sought advantage for himself and his dynasty through straddling *both* political theatres. This points towards how we should interpret not merely his career but Latin East–West relations as a whole in this period. Networks – often to the level of clientage – connected particular Western great powers with leading exponents of the aristocratic diaspora, especially in the Latin East. ‘Clientage’ is certainly the right word to describe John’s relationships, at various stages throughout his career, with the papacy, the Emperor Frederick II, the French monarchy and Countess Blanche of Champagne. It is telling that John’s career can be characterised by these relationships, when he himself was the wearer of the highest-ranking and most prestigious crowns that the Latin East had to offer. Yet this insight permits us to begin to rebut the more blatant models of decline and stagnation that have so often typified analysis of the Latin East from the late twelfth century onwards.

Perhaps the main reason for reassessing John in detail has thus been left until last. His career is both significant and wide-ranging enough for him to find mention in a large number of scholarly works, especially those concerned with the crusades and the Latin East in the early thirteenth century. But many of these short references stumble over basic material, or skim the surface of thorny problems. The classic quick summary of John’s career is provided by Mayer. John was ‘brave and energetic, but by no means a statesman or diplomat of the first rank. His career [is] remarkable for his continual attempts to obtain one crown after another.’⁹ This thumbnail sketch is accurate enough as far as it goes. But statements such as this can easily reduce John to a caricature: always on the make, always on the lookout for a throne. Moreover, the fundamental problem with all such modern vignettes is clear: they are necessarily dependent either on other short references like themselves or on earlier biographical studies that are now thoroughly out of date. This remains true despite, for instance, Fedorenko’s recent effort to survey John’s life.¹⁰

Looking back, it is clear that John was quite widely remembered, at least until the end of the medieval period. Doubtless, his memory was cherished most by his descendants and extended kin group. His sons made a point of styling themselves ‘son[s] of King John of Acre, Emperor of Constantinople’, thus neatly combining something of his two main titles.¹¹ As we will see further, the Franciscan Order also remembered John particularly fondly. The Franciscans probably soon exaggerated

⁹ Mayer, *The Crusades*, 243. ¹⁰ Below, 11.

¹¹ See R. L. Wolff, ‘Mortgage and redemption of an emperor’s son: Castile and the Latin empire of Constantinople’, 76, which can be found most conveniently in his *Studies in the Latin Empire of Constantinople* (London, 1976).

what links there had been between John and the *poverello*, Francis of Assisi himself. Yet they could rightly point to the Emperor John as the first crowned head and the highest-ranking figure ever to join their order.¹² John could even be made to serve the purposes of the late medieval French monarchy, which was always anxious to manufacture extra political capital. A miniature in the *Grandes chroniques de France*, dating from the 1450s, presents a shamelessly blatant ‘royalist’ depiction of the coronation of King Louis VIII in 1223, which John had attended as king of Jerusalem (see Illustration 1). The miniature is surely wrong in depicting John right at the centre of events, where he seems to be crowning Louis’s queen. Yet it is on firmer ground in emphasising the additional lustre that King John’s presence imparted to the event.¹³

More revealingly, during John’s own lifetime he started to become a lead character in certain chivalric-courtly tales. A *récit* by the so-called, and slightly later, ‘Minstrel of Reims’ was widely considered to be close to the truth about John’s early life, until d’Arbois de Jubainville debunked it in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In another of the minstrel’s *récits*, John appears as the principal member of the audience – that is, as the ‘good king’ who commands a Saracen prisoner to tell a tale about Saladin.¹⁵ Clearly, John quickly became the kind of widely known and well-regarded figure around whom it was fashionable to spin such yarns. Doubtless, what made John specially attractive and useful to the minstrel was his astonishing career trajectory. Telling John’s story anew, chivalric-courtly style, was plainly a way not only of providing good entertainment, but also of reiterating the ideals and aspirations of the knightly caste. This puts us back into the world of William Marshal, of knights on the make.

Nevertheless, it is not really surprising that John has ended up almost completely overshadowed by true ‘crusade giants’, such as Richard the Lionheart and St Louis. John’s is now a name known only to specialists, despite the efforts of certain French scholars to write him up as a sort of national hero.¹⁶ Even in the charming little town of Brienne-le-Château itself, John and the rest of his family are more than eclipsed by the memory of the great Napoleon, who attended the town’s famous *école*, and later fought one of his last battles nearby.¹⁷

¹² Below, 180–1. ¹³ Below, 128. ¹⁴ Below, 26–7.

¹⁵ See *Récits d’un ménestrel de Reims au treizième siècle*, ed. N. de Wailly (Paris, 1876), esp. chs. 16, 21.

¹⁶ See esp. R. Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1934–6), III, ch. 15.

¹⁷ The principal memorials to John in Brienne-le-Château itself are a small section in the town museum, devoted to his family, and the name of a rather minor street.



Illustration 1 A miniature from around the 1450s, taken from the *Grandes chroniques de France*, depicting the coronation of King Louis VIII in 1223, which John attended as king of Jerusalem (BnF, MS Français 6465, fol. 247)

John's most bizarre incarnation is surely the *premier danseur* role in Glazunov's crusade fantasy ballet *Raymonda* (1898). A work that deserves to be much better known, it has languished in relative obscurity, mainly because it is almost, but not quite, Tchaikovsky. As might be expected, the ballet's scenario bears very little relation to the known features of John's life. It explores the attraction felt by John's bride-to-be, Raymonda, for the mysterious sexy Saracen, Abderakhman. John kills Abderakhman in a duel at the end of Act II, and by the end of the third act Raymonda has forgiven him for this. It seems that John's name was selected for this character primarily because, at a very early stage, it had been decided that the ballet should feature a great deal of Hungarian dancing. John had been the leader of the Fifth Crusade, Hungary's finest hour in the Holy Land, even though it was not actually all that glorious.

The first serious effort to evaluate John's life and career *in toto* was published in 1727 by the Jesuit missionary Lafitau.¹⁸ The nineteenth century witnessed a succession of monographs on the Briennes by the



Illustration 2 Nehemiah Kish (left) as Jean de Brienne in Glazunov's ballet *Raymonda*

¹⁸ J.-F. Lafitau, *Histoire de Jean de Brienne, roy de Jérusalem et empereur de Constantinople* (Paris, 1727).

likes of Bourgeois, de Montcarmet and Georges.¹⁹ By far the best of these – indeed, the only one to maintain much value into recent times – is de Sassenay’s chronological survey of the Briennes ‘of Lecce and of Athens’ (1869). As its title indicates, this focuses primarily on the later activities of the family’s senior line.²⁰ By 1869, though, d’Arbois de Jubainville had begun his pioneering work, which would soon make most earlier treatments of the Briennes redundant. Implicitly criticising Bourgeois and de Sassenay, d’Arbois de Jubainville was well aware of the need for a good history of the family. He wrote, possibly with false modesty, that he did not consider himself capable of providing it. Yet he succeeded in laying solid foundations for almost all modern studies of the Briennes. He collected – fairly comprehensively – the Brienne comital *acta* (charters, letters, etc.), which he published in 1872.²¹ By then he had sited the Briennes much better within their ancestral region, through his own seven-volume behemoth on the subject of the counts and dukes of Champagne.²² He also produced a groundbreaking analysis of John’s early life (1868).²³

There was then a wait of more than fifty years before the next great leap forward. 1938 proved to be something of an *annus mirabilis*. It witnessed Bréhier’s article ‘Jean de Brienne’ – which, it must be said, retains some importance today mainly because of the extensive list of sources that appears at the end.²⁴ Much more importantly, Böhm’s *Johann von Brienne, König von Jerusalem, Kaiser von Konstantinopel* was published in the same year. *Faute de mieux*, this has been the standard work on John for more than seven decades. Böhm was even better at tracking down little-known sources than Bréhier. Yet his skill at this makes his major omissions all the more glaring. Böhm’s study is further marred by occasional embarrassing blunders, such as when he makes the elementary slip of confusing

¹⁹ M. Bourgeois, *Histoire des comtes de Brienne* (Troyes, 1848); E. de Montcarmet, *Jean de Brienne, roi de Jérusalem et empereur de Constantinople* (Limoges, 1856); E. Georges, *Jean de Brienne, empereur de Constantinople et roi de Jérusalem* (Troyes, 1858).

²⁰ F. de Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d’Athènes: histoire d’une des grandes familles de la féodalité française* (Paris, 1869).

²¹ ‘Catalogue’ – see esp. p. 141.

²² H. d’Arbois de Jubainville and L. Pigeotte, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1859–69).

²³ H. d’Arbois de Jubainville, ‘Recherches sur les premières années de Jean de Brienne, roi de Jérusalem, empereur de Constantinople’, in *Mémoires lus à la Sorbonne: archéologie, histoire, philologie et sciences morales* (1868 – not 1872, as is wrongly said by Böhm in his *Johann von Brienne*), 235–47.

²⁴ L. Bréhier, ‘Jean de Brienne’, in A. Baudrillart et al., eds., *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* (Paris, 1909–), X, cols. 698–709.

John of Braine, brother of the count of Dreux, with John of Brienne.²⁵ It is not surprising that, as long ago as the 1950s, Wolff had already concluded that Böhms *Johann* ‘must be used with caution’.²⁶ We might extend this to observe that, in a manner quite characteristic of contemporaneous scholarly practice, Böhms ‘joined the dots’ to produce a narrative framework that is still acceptable today, but did little to investigate all that props it up. To take a particularly telling example, Böhms never looked closely at the ‘supporting cast’ behind John, whether in France, the kingdom of Jerusalem, Constantinople or anywhere else. The main reason for this is clear: in the 1930s it was not yet *de rigueur* to closely scrutinise the witness lists at the ends of *acta*, which are often the essential tool for revealing such supporting casts. Yet this is now a favourite method of modern scholars – such as Edbury, who, in this way, has thrown much more light on John’s reign as king of Jerusalem.²⁷ It is fair to conclude that, after seventy years, Böhms *Johann* is thoroughly out of date, not only in terms of some of his ‘answers’ but also vis-à-vis what questions he asks of his sources.

The same cannot be said of a recent survey of John’s life, in English, by Fedorenko.²⁸ The fundamental limitation of this text is simply its brevity: it is no more than a medium-sized article. It is plain what Fedorenko is trying to do in this work. He is attempting to bring John ‘out of the closet’, revealing him as a significant figure. Whilst this is an admirable goal, there are limits to how far one should push this perspective. It may be best to conclude that, for all the attractions of Fedorenko’s article, Böhms *Johann* remains the work to question.

The present book seeks to improve on Böhms in a number of ways. For a start, it considers a much broader range of issues and themes. It reviews the main primary sources in the light of more recent scholarship. This has proved much more fruitful than was initially anticipated. Whilst the corpus of sources has not expanded all that much since 1938, medieval and crusade studies have moved on massively since then, giving rise to valuable new ways of interrogating this same body of material. Naturally, efforts have also been made to track down neglected – that is, effectively ‘new’ – sources, particularly in France and Italy. These labours have likewise yielded important results (see the appendices to this book).

²⁵ L. Böhms, *Johann von Brienne, König von Jerusalem, Kaiser von Konstantinopel, um 1170–1237* (Heidelberg, 1938), 70, n. 30; *Catalogue des actes de Philippe-Auguste*, compiled L. Delisle (Paris, 1856), no. 2224.

²⁶ Wolff, ‘Mortgage and redemption of an emperor’s son’, 47 n. 6.

²⁷ See esp. below, 67–71.

²⁸ G. Fedorenko, ‘The crusading career of John of Brienne, c.1210–1237’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 52 (2008), 43–79.

Given the exceptionally episodic nature of John's career, it makes sense to divide his life into chronological, rather than into thematic, blocs. However, within this broad framework, the evidence is treated thematically whenever appropriate, so as to bring out key arguments as coherently as possible. Finally, it is obviously mistaken to try to reduce a whole life – especially one as varied as John's – to a single chain of argument. The conclusion, then, does not seek to encapsulate all the points that have previously been made. Instead, it draws the main threads together to account for John's exceptional career – to show what that very exceptionalism reveals about the 'more ordinary' workings of the Latin Christendom of his day.

This introduction concludes with a short survey of the types of evidence to be deployed in subsequent chapters, briefly touching on the genres, problems and potential of such source material. This book is not based solely on surviving twelfth- and thirteenth-century narratives. It draws on a wide variety of evidence from a multiplicity of provenances, from Compostella, Canterbury and Cologne to Constantinople and Cairo. To maintain control over such a broad evidence-base, and to utilise it sensitively, is a challenge in itself, calling for a great deal of careful source analysis.

Of the narratives that are used, one particular 'family' of manuscripts stands out in importance. Since this family is remarkably complex as well, it has been singled out for special treatment before the main body of the book gets under way. The other narrative sources are tackled as the study proceeds. But it is worth underlining here, at the outset, that *all* historical narratives call for the kind of careful source analysis mentioned in the previous paragraph. The thorough exploration of issues such as authorial identity, purpose and bias, and time and place of composition, is a mere scratching of the surface when it comes to the proper evaluation of such texts.

This book also draws heavily on what have been succinctly labelled 'acta'. Potentially, at least, these constitute a composite genre, since they can include not only charters but also other forms of personal and/or administrative documentation (such as, for instance, letters). Historians have learned to deploy *acta* more and more dextrously, to 'test' and flesh out narrative sources. Alongside this development, though, has come increased awareness that, like the camera, *acta* can easily mislead or lie – in common with all other forms of evidence. Modern studies of the Briennes, in fact, only really began when d'Arbois de Jubainville had collected enough of the comital *acta* so as to be able to criticise confidently the old narrative accounts of the family's activities.

The book employs a variety of non-written evidence, as and when appropriate. For example, the **DAMIETA** and **DAMIATA** coins, minted

during the Fifth Crusade, were badly misinterpreted by Böhm. But, building on Metcalf's observations, it is possible to propose a pertinent new suggestion concerning the 'reversed legends' on the **DAMIATA** type.²⁹ Wiener's recent, comprehensive analysis of John's alleged 'tomb', in the Lower Basilica in Assisi, has likewise proved a powerful springboard for new ideas – in this case, vis-à-vis both what happened to John's body after his death, and the Briennes' 'special relationship' with the Franciscan Order.³⁰

The main primary sources covering John's life and career are part of a highly problematic extended family of narratives: the various 'continuations of William of Tyre', and versions of the associated text now usually labelled 'Ernoul–Bernard'. The most important of these manuscripts will be edited afresh by a team headed by Professor Peter Edbury, the leading authority on this subject. The course adopted below, therefore, is simply to summarise the relevant sections of the sources themselves, and, when appropriate, to review some of Edbury's most recent arguments.³¹

In the 1230s, it seems, someone extended a French translation of William of Tyre's *History* by adding onto it a version of the separate text, 'Ernoul–Bernard'. Although Ernoul–Bernard is a composite, as its modern appellation suggests, what it has to say about John is probably the work of a single author. The end of the text covers John's arrival in Constantinople to take up rule there, in autumn 1231. Then, in some manuscripts at least, we find a date: either 1232 or 1233.³² This suggests that our author stopped because he had brought the narrative almost up to the time of writing. In other words, Ernoul–Bernard reached its final form during John's own lifetime – in his last years, when he was ruling as Latin emperor. It does seem, though, that Ernoul–Bernard was written in the West, even though its subject is the 'business of the Holy Land'. In truth, the author does not know all that much about John's rule in the East as king of Jerusalem. But he is aware of significant details of John's itinerary, when the latter was back in the West again in 1222–31, that eluded a contemporary based in the Holy Land.³³ The author is also highly partisan in John's favour. This makes him very harsh indeed towards the legate

²⁹ Below, 109–10. ³⁰ Below, 183–8.

³¹ The following is therefore based on Ernoul–Bernard; Colbert-Fontainebleau; P. W. Edbury, 'New perspectives on the Old French continuations of William of Tyre', *Crusades* 9 (2010), 107–13, 'Ernoul and the continuations of William of Tyre: approaches and implications' (unpub. paper, delivered at Oxford, 7 February 2011), 'Ernoul, Eracles and the Fifth Crusade' (unpub. paper, delivered at Canterbury, 13 April 2012); and on further informal discussions with him. I would like to extend my most sincere thanks to Professor Edbury for all that he has done to assist me with this thorny subject.

³² Ernoul–Bernard, 472. ³³ For this, see esp. below, 131–2.

Pelagius, and he certainly becomes bitterly hostile and defamatory towards the Emperor Frederick II. When the narrative becomes far-fetched, it is often because the author is seeking to exonerate John, or make the worst possible case against the likes of Pelagius and Frederick.³⁴ But there is surely room for doubt that the author had been particularly close to John. His account of him is hardly very full or detailed, as well as not particularly accurate. In a word, it is all rather anecdotal.

Until Edbury's new edition of Ernoul–Bernard is published, Mas Latrie's transcript (published in 1871) remains the basic version. Edbury thinks Mas Latrie's text is bad enough to warrant re-editing. But Mas Latrie did choose the most appropriate manuscript as his base.

Soon after it was finished, Ernoul–Bernard was used as the basis for a new account, which concentrates far more on the internal affairs of the Latin East. This text has come to be known as the 'Colbert–Fontainebleau continuation'. It is unsurprising, then, that Colbert–Fontainebleau has much more to say about John as a ruler in the East. Conversely, it is not so good on John's decade back in the West, 1222–31. Colbert–Fontainebleau takes its account of John a little further than Ernoul–Bernard, up to and including his first campaign as Latin emperor in 1233. Then the text loses interest in John altogether, and so it does not cover the most fascinating parts of this reign: the formation of a grand alliance against the Latins, the massive assault and siege of Constantinople in 1235–6 and John's death, as a Franciscan, shortly afterwards.³⁵ Yet Colbert–Fontainebleau's explanation of how John became emperor does help us pin down a quite precise *terminus post quem* for the composition of the narrative. Colbert–Fontainebleau's description of Constantinopolitan politics just before John's arrival in 1231 is, in fact, a garbled version of what really took place *after* John's reign, in 1237–9.³⁶ For his part, Edbury agrees that Colbert–Fontainebleau dates from the 1240s or so. So, although Colbert–Fontainebleau is not contemporary with John, it was written very soon after his death – most likely, in his former kingdom of Jerusalem. The narrative offers us a saner, sounder account of John, distinctly more critical of him than Ernoul–Bernard. Perhaps, as Edbury suggests, Colbert–Fontainebleau was composed by someone who was relatively close to Balian of Sidon, the great Jerusalemite lord. Balian had been one of John's closest adherents (he seems to have married his niece, as we shall see), but he then transferred his allegiance to John's opponents: first to the Emperor Frederick II, and then to the Ibelin

³⁴ See esp. below, 135, 140–1. ³⁵ Below, 173–83.

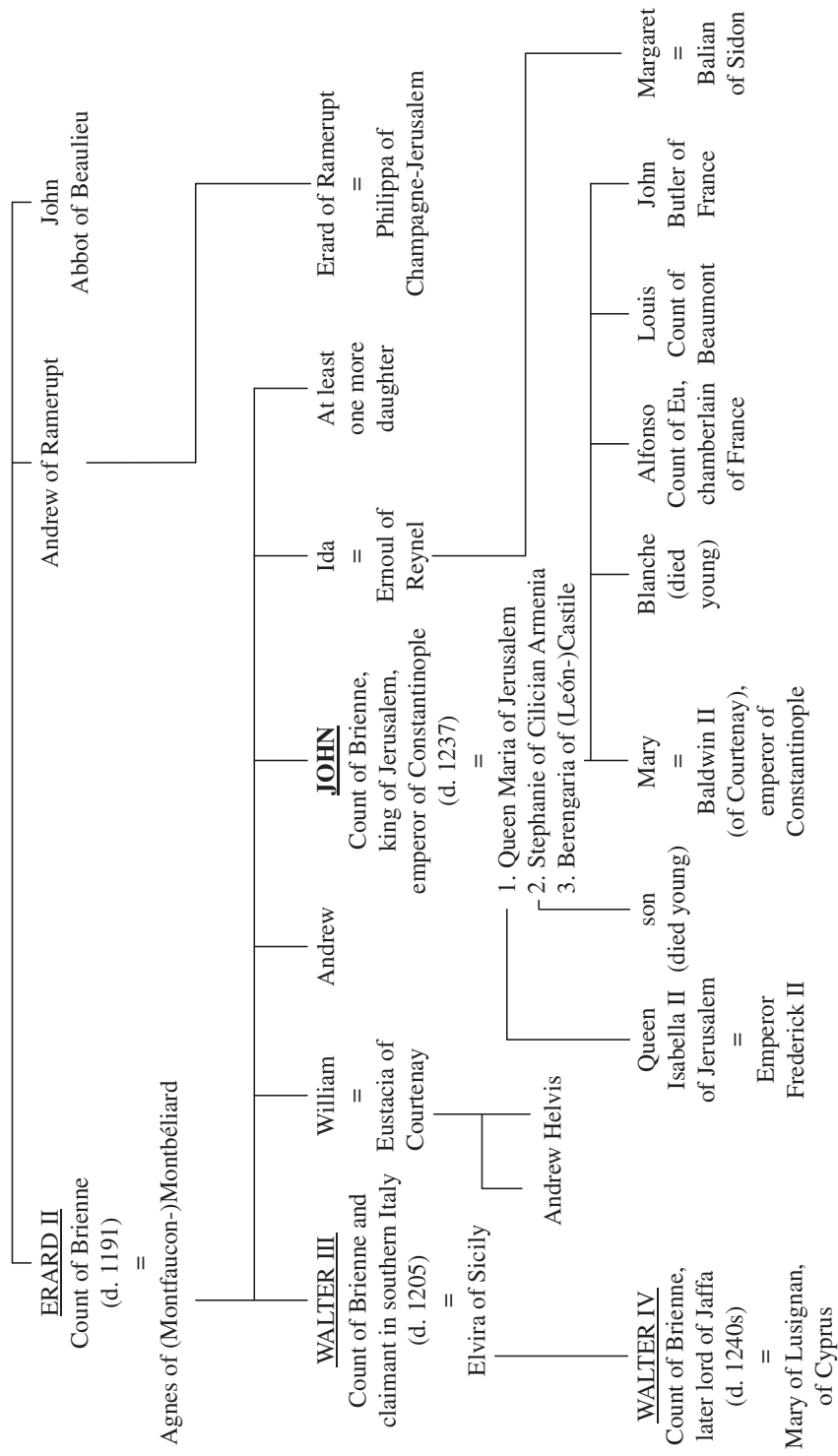
³⁶ See esp. 'Régestes des empereurs latins de Constantinople', comp. B. Hendrickx, *Byzantina* 14 (1988), no. 179**.

party.³⁷ Maybe this is reflected in the rather equivocal way that John is presented in Colbert–Fontainebleau.

Edbury has rightly criticised the editors of the *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades* for giving Colbert–Fontainebleau such prominence amongst other related accounts. Yet this remains the definitive edition, at least for the present: the main text in *RHC: historiens occidentaux*, II, 1–481.

To sum up: when we are looking for John, we cannot dispense with either Ernoul–Bernard or Colbert–Fontainebleau. The former helps us more with the Western side of John’s career, the latter more with the Eastern. But, whilst both texts offer a basically acceptable outline of John’s career, we are obliged to acknowledge their limitations. All our other sources remind us just how limited our knowledge must be, as and when it is confined to these two principal narratives. Even when we bring everything else we have into play, we remain very far removed from a full picture. Properly appreciated, the ‘flatness’ of medieval art can still be quite remarkably illuminating. Much the same can be said for our sources.

³⁷ Below, 66, 103, 137.



Genealogy 1 The main branches of the Brienne family in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries

1 Origins and half a life

This opening chapter seeks to answer two main questions: who was John of Brienne, and how and why did he come to assume an international role during the first decade of the thirteenth century? Yet there is a further point to be made here. It used to be widely agreed that John was born just before 1150. But it is now clear that his birth did not take place until around the mid-1170s, a full generation later.¹ John was not, therefore, about sixty but, instead, just over the age of thirty when his career really took off with his elevation to the crown of Jerusalem. Hence, the subject of this chapter is much more than merely his origins. Half his life is here under scrutiny.

It is worth repeating, at the outset, that a large number of ‘crusade’ and ‘Latin Eastern’ scholars have been obliged to touch either on John himself or on his family. Yet, for all that, the Briennes have never been properly assessed in their original Champenois context. As long ago as 1872, d’Arbois de Jubainville lamented that the dynasty ‘still awaits’ its historian, and it is still waiting.² This, then, is an opportunity to place both studies of John, and of the Briennes in general, onto a new and much sounder footing.

In so far as there is a consensus concerning the first half of John’s life, it can be summarised in just one word: ‘obscure’.³ Until 1199, when he was probably in his early twenties, John is barely mentioned in any of the surviving source material. At first sight, this lacuna can seem to be filled by a certain *récit* of the ‘Minstrel of Reims’: a brief account of John’s early years and rise to be king of Jerusalem. Although the *récit* is quite remarkably apposite in some ways, what it presents is an intolerably romanticised, chivalric-courtly picture of John. In short, it has probably done

¹ Below, 24–6.

² ‘Catalogue’, p. 141. It is worth adding here that I intend to follow this book with a study of the entire Brienne family.

³ The word ‘obscurity’ appears faintly qualified in Steven Runciman’s famous *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1951–4), III, 132.

more to conceal the truth than to reveal it. It was not until the nineteenth century that d'Arbois de Jubainville, having amassed his collection of the Brienne *acta*, was able to debunk the *récit* properly.⁴ Böhm subsequently built on this, to provide what remains an acceptable outline of the first half of John's life.⁵ After this, far and away the most significant development followed in 1957, when Buckley demonstrated that John had indeed been born in the 1170s or so (as Böhm had, in fact, earlier conjectured).⁶ Yet a variety of errors and misconceptions persist to this day. In 2005, for instance, the 'crusader art' historian Folda casually repeated Runciman's assertion that John spent much of his early life serving as 'one of the French king [Philip Augustus's] commanders'.⁷ If anything, the opposite is true.⁸

Above all, the present chapter seeks to site John convincingly within his ancestral context. The most important aspect of this is the Briennes' 'great leap forward' into the spotlight, which began roughly a decade before – and, indeed, culminated in – John's ascent to the throne of Jerusalem in 1208–10. To understand this properly, though, we have to look back further still. This can bring us to the thirty-year period from about 1158 to 1191, when John's father, Erard II, was count of Brienne.

The Brienne background

For the benefit of those who do not know, Colbert-Fontainebleau explains that the county of Brienne is located 'between Bar-sur-Aube and Rosnay'.⁹ It is a sign of the relative insignificance of the county itself that it needed to be explained in this way. However, although it is basically accurate, this description is hardly precise. Perhaps Longnon provides the most notable effort to pinpoint the location and extent of the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century county. Unfortunately, Longnon compromised his own work by drawing superficially precise borderlines on his map, cutting loosely across swathes of territory to show which hamlets pertained to the county of Brienne and which did not.¹⁰ It is better to avoid positing any such lines at all. The obvious starting point is to identify locations at which contemporary counts of Brienne, or members of their immediate family, exercised some kind of lordship. Until now this has never

⁴ Below, 26–7. ⁵ Böhm, *Johann von Brienne*, 7–30. ⁶ See esp. below, 24–6.

⁷ See J. Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land: From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291* (Cambridge, 2005), 105; see also Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 132.

⁸ Below, 30–1. ⁹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 234.

¹⁰ See J. Longnon, *Recherches sur la vie de Geoffroy de Villehardouin* (Paris, 1939), 11, and the map at the end, facing p. 288.

been attempted. For all its obvious limitations, Map 1 confirms the bulk of Longnon's findings, without following him into confident inaccuracy.

In the period that concerns us, the county of Brienne consisted of a more or less homogeneous bloc of land – perhaps rather more than twenty miles by twenty – located in the fertile, prosperous heart of Champagne, not far from the region's effective capital, Troyes. The county of Brienne's heartland was on the banks of the river Aube east of the city, and its *Hauptstadt* was, unsurprisingly, the eponymous castle-town (modern Brienne-le-Château), situated astride one of the main, rich trade routes through Champagne – the old Roman road from Châlons to Langres.¹¹

Nevertheless, there are precious few scraps of evidence with which to guess the wealth, and average annual revenue, of the counts of Brienne during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Basing his surmise on an *actum* issued in 1270, d'Arbois de Jubainville suggested that, by then, the county of Brienne was worth some 3,000 *livres tournois*, but his interpretation of this *actum* has been strongly challenged.¹² In 1201 – right in the heart of the period that we are looking at in this chapter – Count Walter III mortgaged all his land in Champagne for at least 700 *l.*, though it may well have actually been for a fair amount more than that.¹³ On both these occasions, the figures being bandied about are in the high hundreds or thousands, and this at a time when comparatively few of the 'great holdings' in Champagne were worth more than 100 *l.* per annum.¹⁴ This, then, helps confirm what can certainly be deduced from other sources. The county of Brienne was one of the wealthiest individual lordships in Champagne, making its count one of the region's most significant personages. Yet, in terms of his income (as, indeed, in so many other ways), the count of Brienne was not in the same league as his neighbour and suzerain, the count of Champagne, a figure of real stature throughout Latin Christendom.

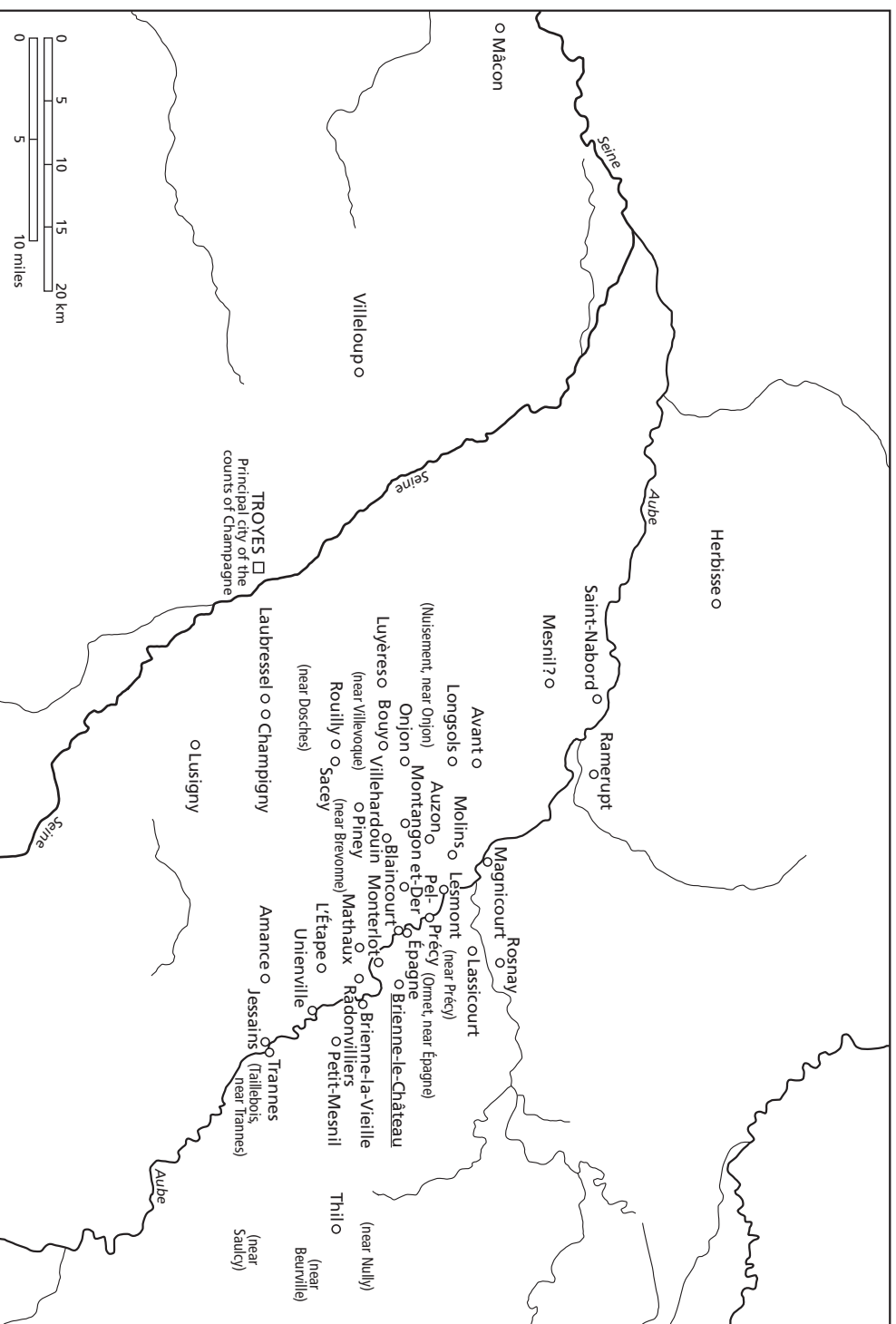
Similarly, the extant sources offer only tantalising hints into the internal workings of the county of Brienne. Yet it is possible to probe this subject a little more than has been done so far. Witness lists, at the ends of *acta* issued by counts of Brienne, reveal something of their 'inner circles' (of advisors, associates, confidants and so on). Such inner circles consisted

¹¹ M. Bur, *La formation du comté de Champagne, v.950–v.1150* (Nancy, 1977), 144; A. Roserot, *Dictionnaire historique de la Champagne méridionale (Aube) des origines à 1790*, 4 vols. (Langres, 1942–8), I, 241.

¹² De Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 53–4.

¹³ 'Catalogue', nos. 124 and 119; see also below, 33–4.

¹⁴ T. Evergates, *Feudal Society in the Bailliage of Troyes under the Counts of Champagne, 1152–1284* (Baltimore, 1975), 111–12.



Map 1 Brienne lordship in their ancestral region, 1158–1210

largely of what we may term ‘Briennois knights’ – that is, rather lesser aristocrats who took their toponym from a village within the county, presumably held of the count.¹⁵ One of these figures – Erard II’s close associate Hato of Lesmont – was seneschal of Brienne during the 1180s.¹⁶ However, by that stage it was possible for Briennois knights to bypass the count of Brienne in various ways, serving, more directly, the suzerain count of Champagne. At least one celebrated family followed this course: the Villehardouin.¹⁷ But the Villehardouins never forgot that the Briennes were, in some way, their ‘lord’. This may well have been significant in a distant Latin Eastern context, late on in John’s career, as we shall see.¹⁸

The Briennes were part of the Champenois ‘old aristocracy’: an elite within the ruling elite, whose tenure of land within the region can sometimes be traced as far back as the year 1000.¹⁹ For their part, the Briennes are first glimpsed in the sources even before that, in the 950s.²⁰ Since then they had fashioned a web of aristocratic connections, primarily within Champagne but also beyond it. This network derived much of its solidity through the standard medium of marriage alliances. In this way, the eleventh- and twelfth-century Briennes had acquired the nearby, regionally significant lordships of Bar-sur-Seine and Ramerupt. These takeovers had the curious effect of raising Bar-sur-Seine into a county, and demoting Ramerupt from that status.²¹ Bar-sur-Seine had slipped out of the Brienne grasp by the late twelfth century, but, even after that, something of the old link between the two survived.²² Ramerupt was divided following its acquisition by the Briennes. Half of it remained in the family’s hands. It was the seat of the main cadet branch of the dynasty in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, when it was held by Erard II’s brother, Andrew of Ramerupt, and then by Andrew’s son. It is worth adding that the counts of Brienne did manage to fashion a lasting suzerainty over this lordship – something that seems to have eluded

¹⁵ See esp. the witness lists to the *acta* collected by d’Arbois de Jubainville, ‘Catalogue’, nos. 60–148. Most of these witness lists can be found printed in *Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes*, ed. C. Lalore, 7 vols. (Troyes, 1875–90).

¹⁶ Ibid., IV, ‘Chartes de Montierender’, no. 84.

¹⁷ See esp. Longnon, *Recherches sur la vie de Geoffroy de Villehardouin*, 10–50, and the brief summary in his *Les compagnons de Villehardouin: recherches sur les croisés de la quatrième croisade* (Geneva, 1978), 26–7.

¹⁸ Below, 166–7, 176. ¹⁹ Evergates, *Feudal Society in the Bailliage of Troyes*, 101–13.

²⁰ ‘Catalogue’, no. 1; *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 919–966*, ed. S. Fanning and B. S. Bachrach (Plymouth, 2004), 56.

²¹ See esp. Roserot, *Dictionnaire historique de la Champagne méridionale*, I, 109, III, 1227–8; and H. d’Arbois de Jubainville, ‘Les premiers seigneurs de Ramerupt’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* 22 (1861), 445–6.

²² Below, 49.

them vis-à-vis Bar-sur-Seine.²³ Certainly, Andrew of Ramerupt was often at Erard's court, quite frequently assenting to, or witnessing, *acta* issued by him.²⁴

The Briennes' marriages in the eleventh and twelfth centuries also brought close kin ties with various other leading Champenois families. These included the Baudements, the Broys(-Beaufort-Châteauvillains), the Joinvilles, the Chacenay(-Durnays) and probably the Chappes (-Plancy).²⁵ It may well have been during the later twelfth century that our John's sister, Ida, married Ernoul of Reynel in eastern Champagne.²⁶ Turning to the Briennes' non-Champenois marriages up to the 1190s, one, in particular, stands out. By the middle of the twelfth century a cadet branch of the house of Montbéliard was already of some importance in the affairs of northeastern France, through its acquisition of the county of Bar.²⁷ In the mid-1160s Erard II of Brienne married Agnes, who hailed from the line of the family still in place at Montbéliard.²⁸ Walter III, and our John, were amongst their sons. More than thirty years later the close relationship between the Briennes and Agnes's branch of the Montbéliards was to prove of enormous advantage to both families.²⁹

Since around 1100 the counts of Brienne had acknowledged, without demur, the effective primacy or suzerainty of their neighbours, the counts of Champagne. Soon after that, it seems, the Briennes adopted a stance of (respectfully?) 'keeping their distance' from their much more powerful neighbour.³⁰ But they could not avoid becoming entangled in the process by which the counts of Champagne became increasingly bureaucratically assertive as the late twelfth century progressed. The county of Brienne is listed as the first 'fief' of the Troyes and Isle region in the first *Feoda Campanie*, drawn up for the count of Champagne following *enquêtes* in 1178.³¹ Nevertheless, the document lists no formal, specific services that the count of Brienne was required to perform (much the same treatment that most Champenois magnates received). Moreover, the count of

²³ See d'Arbois de Jubainville, 'Les premiers seigneurs de Ramerupt', 445–7; Roserot, *Dictionnaire historique de la Champagne méridionale*, III, 1227–8; and T. Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne, 1100–1300* (Philadelphia, 2007), 172.

²⁴ 'Catalogue', nos. 61, 63, 67–9, 73, 75–6, 82, 85, 93, 95.

²⁵ See esp. the family tree in Roserot, *Dictionnaire historique de la Champagne méridionale*, I, part 3, nos. 3–4; Evergates, *Feudal Society in the Bailliage of Troyes*, 168–9, 191–3, and *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 252–3.

²⁶ Not to be confused with the chronicler and narrative that bears the same name. See Colbert-Fontainebleau, 332.

²⁷ That is, the later Bar-le-Duc, not Bar-sur-Seine or Bar-sur-Aube. ²⁸ Below, 25.

²⁹ See below, 32, 42–3, 56, 65–7, 77, 135–7.

³⁰ See esp. 'Catalogue', nos. 23, 26–7, 30–2, 43, 48, 52, 82, 109.

³¹ Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 17–21.

Brienne is here acknowledged as he would have wished, as lord of both 'Brienne and Ramerupt...'³² The attitude of John's father, Erard II, towards the counts of Champagne perhaps found best expression at the very end of his life. Like his suzerain, Count Henry II of Champagne, Erard took the cross following news of the battle of Hattin (1187), before heading east on the Third Crusade. Erard led his own contingent, though, travelling separately, ahead of Henry. However, once Henry had arrived in the East, the chances are that Erard and his contingent joined with their fellow Champenois in Henry's host, and surely fought under his banner, as well as their own.³³

Like so many of their aristocratic contemporaries, the Briennes proved themselves perfectly capable of alternately endowing, harassing, protecting and plundering religious institutions. Naturally, they had a great deal to do with monasteries close at hand, such as Beaulieu, Bassefontaine and Larivour. But their reach and contacts clearly extended further afield. For instance, a little-known *actum* shows that, from the mid-twelfth century onwards, the counts began making donations to the Order of Fontevraud. The motherhouse of this order was, of course, located in distant Anjou.³⁴ The Briennes kept up to date with the spiritual currents of their day. At around the same time, they started to show a special fondness for the Premonstratensian Order. In the 1140s a count of Brienne was at least the de facto founder of the Premonstratensian abbey of Bassefontaine, just adjacent to the castle-town of Brienne itself.³⁵ The uncle and namesake of our John was the abbot of another nearby Premonstratensian house, Beaulieu, from the 1150s through to the 1190s. Like his other sibling, Andrew of Ramerupt, Abbot John came fairly often to the court of their eldest brother, Erard II, witnessing *acta* for him comparatively frequently.³⁶

Much more a regional than a kingdom-wide power, the eleventh- and twelfth-century counts of Brienne came to wider notice relatively rarely. When they did so, the reason was often some notorious act of depredation against a religious community. This was why a sentence of excommunication was drawn up against Count Walter I of Brienne in the

³² *Feoda Campanie* i, no. 1884, in *Documents relatifs au comté de Champagne et de Brie, 1172–1361*, ed. A. Longnon, 3 vols. (Paris, 1901–14).

³³ See the *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi*, in *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols. (London, 1864–5), I, 67–71; and Ralph of Diss, *The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols. (London, 1876), II, 79.

³⁴ See Appendix 1, no. 12. In this case, though, what was granted was located nearby.

³⁵ See esp. the summary in Roserot, *Dictionnaire historique de la Champagne méridionale*, I, 133–4.

³⁶ 'Catalogue', nos. 60, 62–3, 69, 83, 89, 92–3, 95, 98–9.

1080s.³⁷ A hundred years later there was serious trouble between Erard II and various monasteries in the vicinity, requiring the arbitration of a papal judge-delegate, who ruled on the matter in Paris.³⁸ During the intervening century, though, Brienne involvement in ‘the business of the Holy Land’ could well have done much to boost the family’s standing amongst both clergy and laity. Like many other aristocratic dynasties in the Champagne region, the twelfth-century Briennes established a ‘family tradition’ of crusading. But we may well doubt that the then count of Brienne, Erard I, actually participated in the First Crusade. More likely, he accompanied his lord, the count of Champagne, to the Holy Land in 1114.³⁹ Subsequent counts of Brienne took part in both the Second and Third Crusades. Erard II seems to have gone on the Second Crusade as a young man, alongside his father, Count Walter II. Ultimately, Erard II was to perish on the Third Crusade, forty years later.⁴⁰

It is hard to escape the impression that the Briennes grew in stature between the time of their first footsteps in the Holy Land and the Third Crusade. By 1189 the twin heads of the family were plainly regarded as figures of some consequence, whose presence and deeds on the Third Crusade warranted considerable reportage. Indeed, their heroic deaths on that crusade – first of Andrew of Ramerupt, then of Erard II himself – may well have played their part in raising the prestige of the family to new heights as the 1190s opened.⁴¹ In short, it is possible to argue that the Briennes’ ‘great leap forward’ really began now, when the leading members of the family died for Christ before the walls of Acre.

Out of the cloister

To this day, it is still sometimes asserted that John was born in around 1148.⁴² But, if that were so, then he had already reached the age of sixty ‘before he began to play any considerable part in history’ – that is, by

³⁷ See *ibid.*, no. 14; see also Bur, *La formation du comté de Champagne*, 356, 363 n. 86, 366–7.

³⁸ See ‘Catalogue’, nos. 85–8, 95, and perhaps also nos. 99–100. See, too, the following MS in the BnF: MS Français 20690, fol. 168.

³⁹ This is a point that I will explore in much more detail in my next work, on the entire Brienne family.

⁴⁰ ‘Catalogue’, nos. 45–6, 100, and see the next footnote.

⁴¹ Andrew’s gallant death in battle is described in hagiographic detail in the *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi*, 71. Perhaps Erard’s ‘cowardice’ on this occasion was more than made up for by his own death, maybe from disease, which followed over a year later, in 1191. A precise date for this, 8 February, is given in *Obituaires de la province de Sens*, ed. A. Molinier *et al.*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1902–23), IV, 335.

⁴² See, for instance, J. Godin, ‘Des monnaies franques en Orient latin frappées par des Champenois aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles’, *La vie en Champagne*, new series 16 (1998), 5.

becoming king of Jerusalem.⁴³ This would make him mainly in his seventies when he led the lengthy and gruelling Fifth Crusade, during which he performed a number of celebrated knightly feats. He would have been over eighty when he commanded a papal army that burned and pillaged its way through southern Italy, and when he was appointed future emperor of Constantinople. Provision was even made to cover what would happen should he survive for another decade or so (!); this, in fact, he ‘very nearly did’.⁴⁴ As emperor, John led at least one famous cavalry sally – and hence may well have fought hand to hand – before his death a couple of years later, in his late eighties.

Certainly, on the face of it, this chronology looks impossible. Perhaps the best weapon to destroy it is Buckley’s simple but devastating observation: if a ‘heroic octogenarian’ really did all these things, then ‘his contemporaries seem strangely unaware of it’.⁴⁵ Buckley is right to note that this whole faulty edifice rests mainly on the eyewitness account of the Greek historian George Akropolites, who saw John in Constantinople in the early 1230s (when Akropolites himself was yet a teenager). According to Akropolites, at that stage John appeared to be ‘around 80...or even [older]’.⁴⁶ Buckley has been able to show just how badly wrong this is, though. John was ‘a [whole] generation younger’ than Akropolites guessed.⁴⁷

Briefly, Buckley’s argument is this. From the extant Brienne *acta*, it would seem that John’s parents, Erard and Agnes, wedded in around 1166, fixing an approximate earliest date for any children born of the marriage. Remarkably, John is never mentioned in any of the *acta* issued by his father; this is a point that we will return to shortly. But John’s three brothers *are* mentioned: Walter, William and Andrew, apparently born in that order.⁴⁸ In 1177 Erard described his sons as ‘liberis’, which literally means ‘children’. Walter, the eldest and his father’s heir, is mentioned along with his tutor (‘pedagogus’) as late as 1184. Moreover, the dates at which Erard’s sons married confirms that they were yet quite young in the 1170s and 1180s. Andrew, for one, did not live long enough to do so. He probably died soon after assenting to an *actum* issued in 1181.⁴⁹ Walter,

⁴³ See J. M. Buckley’s translation of Bréhier, in ‘The problematical octogenarianism of John of Brienne’, *Speculum* 32 (1957), 315.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 321. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁴⁶ G. Akropolites, *The History*, tr. and introd. R. Macrides (Oxford, 2007), ch. 27.

⁴⁷ Buckley, ‘The problematical octogenarianism of John of Brienne’, 322.

⁴⁸ See esp. ‘Catalogue’, nos. 76, 81, 85, 91, 93, 95, 99, 104, 106, 109. (In the ‘Catalogue’, a wrong date is assigned to no. 104 – see below, footnote 66.) See also *Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes*, IV, ‘Chartes de Montiérender’, no. 84.

⁴⁹ *Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes*, IV, ‘Chartes de Montiérender’, no. 84.

the heir, married in 1199 or 1200.⁵⁰ William, plainly the second surviving son, seems to have tied the knot just before Walter.⁵¹ As for John, his first marriage took place just over a decade later, in 1210.⁵² If Akropolites' chronology is correct, all three of Erard's surviving sons waited until what was effectively old age before marrying, gratuitously risking the very survival of their family. Yet, if, in reality, the three brothers were born in the aftermath of 1166, then they were all somewhere around the age of thirty when they married. Whilst this may still appear quite late, it is by no means unheard of for high-ranking bridegrooms in contemporary Champagne.⁵³ Buckley concludes that, since John's parents were married in about 1166, and since he had several older brothers, John could not have been born before 1169. Buckley's own estimate is that John was born somewhere in the period 1169–74.⁵⁴

This does require some modification, though. Keeping a close eye on Erard and Agnes' sons, Buckley somehow contrives to overlook all the daughters. Ida, apparently John's sister, has already been mentioned.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Champenois chronicler Aubry of Troisfontaines (an approximate contemporary, often well informed about the Briennes) wrote that John had sisters, 'sororibus', in the plural.⁵⁶ If, like Walter, William and perhaps Andrew, one or more of these sisters was born before John, then John's own date of birth must be pushed still later. In short, although we can cautiously accept Buckley's range of dates, 1169–74, it is probably best to favour either the later part of that period or the years immediately following. My own working assumption has been that John was born in the mid-1170s.

Why is John never mentioned in his father's *acta*, unlike his brothers? A variety of explanations can be put forward, mostly turning on a highly suspect source: a *récit* ascribed to the later thirteenth-century 'Minstrel of Reims'. The *récit* states that John's father, Count Walter (*sic*), intended that the boy should become a cleric, but John himself did not want that. So John fled to the monastery of Clairvaux, where he was cared for by his maternal uncle. Subsequently, John was taken away from Clairvaux by some knights, who had been struck by his noble bearing, and evidently thought that he would make a splendid knight himself. Entering the service of the lord of Châteauvillain, John did, indeed, become a tournament knight *nonpareil*. John's friends now asked his father to provide him

⁵⁰ Below, 31–2. ⁵¹ Below, 31. ⁵² See esp. below, 40–53.

⁵³ Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 159.

⁵⁴ Buckley, 'The problematical octogenarianism of John of Brienne', 315–22.

⁵⁵ See Colbert-Fontainebleau, 332; and Genealogy 1, above.

⁵⁶ Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, ed. P. Scheffer-Boichorst, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 23, 879.

with some land of his own. Since the count – still incensed with him – refused to do so, John became known by the inevitable soubriquet of ‘Lackland’. His prowess in tournaments and war had become so spectacular, though, that his comrades-in-arms continued to supply all his needs. When word of John reached even the distant land of Syria, the barons there chose him to marry their lady, and so become their king. John was still obliged to turn to his principal aristocratic backers, though – to the lords of Châteauvillain and Joinville – so that he could travel out to the East in suitable style. Having sailed from Marseilles, John was greeted by the barons of the kingdom of Jerusalem with fine courtliness and respect. He married their lady in the Church of the Holy Cross at Acre, before his coronation at Beirut. Thus, John ‘Lackland’ became ‘Good King John’.⁵⁷

As long ago as the 1860s, d’Arbois de Jubainville exposed most of the historical flaws in this chivalric-courtly tosh. The most obvious is, of course, the conflation of our John with the real ‘Lackland’, the contemporary Angevin king of England. Yet, as d’Arbois de Jubainville rightly observed, the *récit* does contain a number of quite remarkably apposite textual details. For instance, although John did not have a maternal uncle at Clairvaux, he did indeed have a paternal one who was a senior religious figure elsewhere, in the person of his namesake, Abbot John of Beaulieu. Whilst our John was not dependent on the lords of Châteauvillain and Joinville in the way that the *récit* suggests, it is quite true that he was closely connected to them both. They were, in fact, amongst his principal seigneurial kinsmen in Champagne.⁵⁸ Although the *récit* is wrong to say that John was crowned at Beirut, it does appear to be correct that he embarked at Marseilles.⁵⁹

The *récit*, then, may well be right that John was intended for the Church at a young age. Both John’s position in the dynasty, and his very name, lend considerable support to this view. The only previous member of the family to be called ‘John’ had also been a younger son of a count, destined for the Church: namely, the abbot of Beaulieu. If John was indeed given to a monastery at a young age, though, then he may not have spent his early years either with his uncle at Beaulieu, or at Clairvaux, since neither of these reformed monasteries would normally accept children.⁶⁰ Wherever he might have been consigned, the chances are that John abandoned the religious life whilst yet quite young. It seems that he did not stay in ‘his monastery’ long enough to be obliged to take vows. Moreover, if he had

⁵⁷ *Récits d’un ménestrel de Reims*, ch. 16. ⁵⁸ Above, 22.

⁵⁹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 310.

⁶⁰ Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 161. But it is possible that at Beaulieu, at least, they would have made an exception for the count of Brienne’s son.

quit the cloister comparatively late, he would have found it difficult to develop quickly the physique and skills necessary to be a successful knight (which he does seem to have been, already, by the late 1190s). Undoubtedly, John had returned to the court of Brienne as a secular figure by the mid-1190s at the very latest – that is, when Erard II was (safely?) dead, and John himself was around twenty.⁶¹ In short, what we have here are a variety of potential explanations why John is never mentioned in his father's *acta*.

The young John may well have learned to read and write in his monastery. Later, he seems to have become sufficiently skilled to compose *trouvère* (or 'troubadour') songs. This was a burgeoning aristocratic pastime with a strong base in Champagne, especially slightly later under John's contemporary, Count Theobald IV 'le Chansonnier'.⁶² Of the handful of surviving lyrics widely attributed to John, all are *chansons d'amour*, except for a *pastorelle*. None of these heavily stylised literary texts offers much insight into the life or personality of their author(s).⁶³ However, 'Donna audite como' is in Old Italian. If John did indeed compose it, he could have done so only after he had acquired suitable facility in that language. When we consider this in conjunction with other aspects of the *chanson*, it may be best to conclude that John wrote it in the 1220s, when he was in Italy, closely connected to the Emperor Frederick II (whose court was the home of the so-called 'Sicilian lyric school'). If so, then it is one of the oldest surviving texts recognisably in Italian, alongside Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Sun*. To echo what Abulafia says about Frederick's own compositions, what is noteworthy and enjoyable about the verses attributed to John is their 'pleasantly delicate handling of... beautiful language[s]'.⁶⁴

Par desous l'ombre d'un bois / Trovai pastore à mon chois. . . / – Pastorele, si t'est bel / Dame seras d'un chastel. . .
Donna audite como / mi tegno vostro omo / e non d'altro signore. . .⁶⁵

If both of the above were indeed written by John, then they demonstrate his proficiency not only in different languages but also in distinct poetic genres.

⁶¹ Below, 29.

⁶² See esp. *Les chansonniers de Champagne au XII et XIII siècles*, ed. P. Tarbé (repr. Geneva, 1980); Theobald IV of Champagne, *The Lyrics of Thibaut de Champagne*, ed. K. Brahney (London, 1989); and C. Taittinger, *Thibaud le Chansonnier, comte de Champagne* (Paris, 1987).

⁶³ The relevant texts can be found in *Les chansonniers de Champagne*, 21–3; and in *Poeti italiani della corte di Federico II*, ed. B. Panvini (Catania, 1989), 107–12.

⁶⁴ D. Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (repr. London, 2002), 277.

⁶⁵ *Les chansonniers de Champagne*, 21–2; *Poeti italiani della corte di Federico II*, 107.

By the mid-1190s John was back in Brienne as a secular figure. As the youngest brother of the new count of Brienne, Walter III, he was a prominent Champenois aristocrat.⁶⁶ But was John landless at this point, as the *récit* would seem to suggest? Evergates has shown that it was normal to divide inheritances in contemporary Champagne, and siblings constituted the group that stood to benefit most from this practice.⁶⁷ It may well be, then, that, on his return to Brienne, John was granted some quite substantial tracts of land by Walter III. Certainly, by 1201 John was in possession of Trannes, Jessains, Onjon, Pel and Der.⁶⁸ The old cliché of the ‘landless younger son’ thus does not appear to fit John very well.

The *récit* may nevertheless be right to suggest that, at around this time, John made a name for himself as a knight, both in tournaments and, perhaps a little later, in war. Tournaments (‘tourneys’ is perhaps a better term to describe them in this period) may be characterised as elite social gatherings, revolving around displays of prowess and practice or preparation for ‘real’ warfare. The tourney was at the height of its popularity in the late twelfth century, when a sort of ‘tournament circuit’ wound its way across northern France in particular, frequented by the likes of the ‘Young King’ of England, Henry (d. 1183), and his sometime tutor in military matters, William Marshal.⁶⁹ A crucial part of the attraction of tourneys was the opportunities they provided for successful knights to better themselves dramatically. The fruits of victory could often include the lordship or patronage of new and greater figures; sizeable ransoms and other sums of money; weapons, armour, warhorses and other (often very expensive) items of equipment; and, not least, some glory or celebrity. This last should not be underestimated in a society so concerned with honour and renown.⁷⁰

John clearly developed the physique that was necessary to fight well. The longest surviving thirteenth-century description of his appearance is, unfortunately, by the notoriously untrustworthy Salimbene of Adam. But the latter is on sure ground when he emphasises John’s size and strength: ‘[He] was a huge man, tall and powerful...’⁷¹ As we have seen, Akropolites

⁶⁶ ‘Catalogue’, nos. 104, 106, 109. No. 104 is the earliest document to attest to John’s existence, and it indicates that, by then, he was already once again a secular aristocrat. It is therefore particularly unfortunate that, in the ‘Catalogue’, it is wrongly labelled ‘1192’, when in fact it is dated 1194 (for this, see esp. Longnon, *Recherches sur la vie de Geoffroy de Villehardouin*, ‘Catalogue des actes des Villehardouin’, no. 34).

⁶⁷ Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 154, 196. ⁶⁸ Below, 34.

⁶⁹ Crouch, *William Marshal*, 31–56.

⁷⁰ D. Crouch, *Tournament* (London, 2005), esp. 19–38, 96–8, 106–8.

⁷¹ Salimbene, *Cronica*, ed. G. Scalia, in *Corpus christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis*, no. 125, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1998), I, 62; see also Auria’s continuation of the *Brevis regni Ierosolymitani historia*, MGH, SS, vol. 18, 55.

saw him in the 1230s, towards the end of John's life. Akropolites confirms this, adding that, by then, John had rather padded out: 'I was greatly impressed by the man's size which surpassed that of others by far in every dimension.'⁷² John's various celebrated feats of arms confirm that he was, indeed, an excellent knight. Salimbene, and others like him, could not resist overcooking this, though. Whilst one chronicler gushingly described John as an 'alter Alexander',⁷³ Salimbene's vision of John takes us rather nearer Hercules:

When John went to war and was inflamed with fighting, nobody could bear to confront him; [rather,] facing such a vigorous and strong fighter, [his enemies] fled. . . indeed, it was said that, in his day, there was no soldier in the world better than him. . . and when, in battle, he struck here and there with his iron club, the Saracens fled before him as if they were facing the Devil, or a lion appearing to devour them.⁷⁴

John's size and strength could well have contributed to the widespread impression that he was really rather good-looking (at least, in his younger days). Again, though, some sources surrender to hyperbole: for instance, describing him as 'handsome in appearance, before the sons of men'.⁷⁵

What about experience of 'real' warfare? Relating how John subsequently became king of Jerusalem, Colbert-Fontainebleau explains that the French king, Philip Augustus, wanted John out of his kingdom, partly on account of the great 'outrage and shame' that John had earlier inflicted on Philip's close kinsman, Peter of Courtenay.⁷⁶ This throwaway remark can easily slip by unnoticed, yet it may reveal the foundations of John's later formidable military reputation. At some point, it seems in the late 1190s, Peter of Courtenay, count of Nevers, Auxerre and Tonnerre, went to war against his own vassal, the skilful opportunist Hervé of Donzy. The Briennes may have become embroiled in this conflict, perhaps primarily because it was being fought out in territory adjoining theirs. It would seem that they allied with Hervé against Peter, whilst Peter sought to call in a much greater power, his kinsman, King Philip. Philip was preoccupied with his own protracted struggle against the Angevin King Richard I 'the Lionheart' of England, though. Able to spare only a bare minimum of time and resources, Philip was reduced to watching from the sidelines as

⁷² Akropolites, *The History*, ch. 27.

⁷³ The *Chronique des comtes d'Eu* – which contains a version of the *récit*'s account of John's early life – in *RHGF*, XXIII, 443.

⁷⁴ Salimbene, *Cronica*, I, 62–3. For more on the 'lion' theme, see below, 50, footnote 162.

⁷⁵ See *Annales S. Iustinae Patavini*, ed. P. Jaffé, in *MGH*, SS, vol. 19, 151; and the *Chronico Rotomagensi*, in *RHGF*, XVIII, 359.

⁷⁶ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 307.

Hervé (and the Briennes?) forced Peter to terms.⁷⁷ (This is all rather ironic, because later, after many vicissitudes, John would become the guardian of Peter's son, Baldwin II of Constantinople.)⁷⁸ Peace between the Courtenays and the Briennes may well have been sealed by the marriage of John's elder brother, William, to Peter's daughter Eustacia. However, it is possible that they were married before that – maybe another reason for the Briennes' involvement in the first instance.⁷⁹ Whenever precisely it took place, the marriage brought with it close kinship ties to the ruling houses of France, Champagne and Flanders. It was thus a significant step forward for the Briennes, and rather more important than has usually been realised.

The Briennes' involvement in this conflict may have accelerated the process by which they drew closer and closer to the suzerain house of Champagne. All three brothers, Walter III, William and John, were at Troyes in April 1195.⁸⁰ Three years later the trio witnessed an *actum* issued by the new count of Champagne, Theobald III.⁸¹ In the same year, when Theobald did homage to the French king, William of Brienne was amongst those who stood surety for him.⁸² By 1199 or so William may have held the village of Herbissee directly from Theobald.⁸³

At the very end of the century Walter III was amongst a handful of northern French counts who temporarily 'abandoned the king of France', allying instead with the Angevin Richard the Lionheart.⁸⁴ It is believable that Walter had been provoked into doing this by Philip's earlier support for Peter of Courtenay. Perhaps, for a brief period, Walter and his immediate suzerain, Theobald of Champagne, were formally on opposite sides. At any rate, it is unlikely that King Philip swiftly forgot the serious irritation that the Briennes had proved capable of causing in the late 1190s.

Tragedies and opportunities

Walter III's marriage to Elvira of Sicily, at the turn of the new century, marked a watershed: the Brienne family's real emergence onto the international stage as protagonists in their own right. This was the start of the dynasty's great epoch. The Briennes' sudden rise under Walter is perhaps *the* critical part of the backdrop to John's own rise to be king of Jerusalem, a decade later.

⁷⁷ Ralph of Diss, *The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto*, II, 167.

⁷⁸ See esp. below, 151–2. ⁷⁹ See Genealogy 1, above. ⁸⁰ 'Catalogue', no. 106.

⁸¹ Ibid, no. 109. ⁸² Ibid., no. 108. ⁸³ Below, 33.

⁸⁴ Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols. (London, 1868–71), IV, 54.

At the very end of the 1190s Sibylla, widow of the former King Tancred of Sicily, arrived with her daughters in France. Sibylla was looking for a high-ranking French aristocrat to marry her eldest surviving child, Elvira. What was needed was a lord capable of upholding Elvira's claims against those who now controlled the kingdom of Sicily for the young king of the rival line, Frederick of Hohenstaufen (that is, the future Emperor Frederick II). Colbert-Fontainebleau offers the most detailed account of what happened next. It explains that, when Sibylla approached King Philip for assistance, he responded by convening a council at Melun. There, it was agreed that Elvira would marry Walter of Brienne. The chances are that Philip seized this opportunity not only to emphasise his own authority over the troublesome count of Brienne, but also to encourage the count to leave northern France for the foreseeable future. This kind of approach was to become practised policy for Philip. De Sassenay rightly doubted, though, whether the French king really did pay Walter the massive sum of 20,000 *l. parisis*, mentioned in Colbert-Fontainebleau.

It seems that Walter took the cross just after his marriage. What we now call the 'Fourth Crusade' was launched in November 1199 by his suzerain, Theobald III of Champagne, and it soon worked to Walter's advantage. Many leading regional figures were making preparations to go east, and Walter persuaded some of them to fight with him in southern Italy before travelling onwards, if they wished, to the Holy Land. According to Colbert-Fontainebleau, when Walter finally crossed into Italy he had a small host, spearheaded by sixty knights and forty mounted sergeants. The future chronicler Geoffrey of Villehardouin (himself a vassal of the count of Brienne for his ancestral lordship) encountered the army in the Alps. Thanks to him, we know the identities of some of the principal lords who had opted to fight with Walter. Geoffrey names three: Walter of Montbéliard, Robert of Joinville and Eustace of Conflans. Two of these, at least, were numbered amongst Walter III's kinsmen.⁸⁵ The name that stands out is Walter of Montbéliard, cousin to Walter III and John. Ultimately, he did continue out to the Latin East, as we shall see. There he rose rapidly, becoming constable of the kingdom of Jerusalem and regent of Cyprus.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See above, 22. Longnon has suggested that the Conflans were also closely related to the Briennes: see *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 21.

⁸⁶ For Walter of Montbéliard's relationship to Walter III and John, see esp. B. Hamilton, 'King consorts of Jerusalem and their entourages from the West from 1186 to 1250', in H. E. Mayer, ed., *Die Kreuzfahrerstaaten als multikulturelle Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1997), 19 n. 45.

Before launching his campaign in southern Italy, Walter III acquired both the blessing of, and substantial aid from, the pope. Innocent III's position was not straightforward, though. Although he was the guardian of the young king Frederick, Innocent was nevertheless committed to opposing those who were controlling the kingdom of Sicily in Frederick's name. Circumspectly declining to acknowledge Elvira's (and hence Walter's) claim to the crown of Sicily itself, Innocent did recognise their right to particular lordships: to the principality of Taranto and the county of Lecce. Walter was astute enough to realise that this was quite sufficient to give him an effectively free hand in southern Italy. Entering Frederick's kingdom in the late spring of 1201, by the end of the year Walter appeared triumphant, having comprehensively defeated his opponents at the set-piece battle of Capua and on the ancient battlefield of Cannae. Innocent now urged the conqueror to cross to the island of Sicily itself, to root out the pope's chief adversaries there. Walter was disinclined to do this, though, focusing instead on consolidating his dominance on the mainland. However, he was to find that defeating his enemies in battle was not the same thing as securing uncontested control.⁸⁷

John benefited from these developments primarily because he now stood next in line to Walter. Their other brother, William, had died, perhaps soon after his marriage to Eustacia of Courtenay.⁸⁸ This made John the only surviving mature male of the senior line of the house of Brienne apart, of course, from Walter III himself. However, William did leave behind him not only a widow but also infant heirs, Andrew and Helvis.⁸⁹

Perhaps, though, it was John, and not William's immediate family, who soon succeeded to at least some of the land that had earlier belonged to William? By early 1201 John had acquired Herbisce. Maybe it had been in William's hands earlier – for when, in March, John ceded the village to the count of Champagne, he guaranteed the count's rights there against any claims that might be advanced by William's heirs. In return, John received a range of possessions (at Mâcon, Onjon, Luyères, Avant, Longsols and Rouilly), two men and 780 *l*.⁹⁰

There was an obvious reason why John needed the money. In 1201 Walter III was still in Champagne, making preparations for his expedition to Italy. Urgently needing all the manpower, cash and

⁸⁷ The above few paragraphs have been derived chiefly from Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 16–8; and from de Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 32–82.

⁸⁸ William had certainly died by April 1200 – for, by then, John had started to issue *acta* of his own. See below, 34.

⁸⁹ See above, Genealogy 1. ⁹⁰ 'Catalogue', no. 119.

matériel that he could get, Walter was prepared to make sacrifices to obtain them.⁹¹ In February 1200 he agreed that Trannes, Jessains, Onjon, Pel and Der – all of which John may well have held from him – should instead be held directly from the count of Champagne. In exchange, Walter received from Count Theobald another village that he was authorised to sell, presumably to raise money for the Italian expedition.⁹² As a result, in the third *Feoda Campanie* (1201), John is described as the count of Champagne's vassal for Trannes, Jessains, Onjon, Pel and Der, 'saving his fealty to the count of Brienne... and [John] is also the count [of Champagne's] man for Herbissee, and for other possessions which he holds from [that] count'.⁹³ More interestingly, the very same *actum* that records John's sale of Herbissee, for 780 *l.* in March 1201, also reveals that John intended to pay over much of this sum to his brother, Count Walter. D'Arbois de Jubainville's suggestion was that Walter III had pledged to John his possessions between the Seine and the Aube, and surely this denotes the vast majority of Walter's territory.⁹⁴ A month later, in April 1201, Walter certainly mortgaged all his (remaining?) land to the count of Champagne, for a further 700 *l.*⁹⁵

John was now also the obvious candidate to be the effective regent of Brienne whilst Walter was away – subject, no doubt, to the mortgage(s) that had been agreed. Some of the groundwork for this 'regency' had been laid down soon after William's death, as early as 1199 or so. Until then, it was unusual for lesser figures in the Brienne family to issue *acta* of their own. Now, though, John started to issue his own *acta*, initially doing so simply to formalise his assent to several of his brother's decisions.⁹⁶ Clearly, it was felt desirable to record his assent in this special way because he was the person who would soon be left in charge, in Walter's place.

At the very start of John's effective regency, all Champagne was shaken by the sudden early death of Theobald III. Theobald's widow, Countess Blanche, quickly assumed the regency for their son, the posthumous heir, Theobald IV. But it is worth emphasising the great difficulties that she faced within Champagne, from the very earliest days of her long

⁹¹ See, for example, *ibid.*, no. 122. ⁹² *Ibid.*, no. 111.

⁹³ *Feoda Campanie* iii, no. 2533, in *Documents relatifs au comté de Champagne et de Brie*.

⁹⁴ This same *actum* further stipulated that, having paid Walter III, John then had to use the remaining money to purchase land held in fief from the count of Champagne ('Catalogue', no. 119).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 124; see also de Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 55.

⁹⁶ 'Catalogue', nos. 115, 123.

regency.⁹⁷ Arguably, her main task was to assure herself of the support of the greatest lords within the county. Amongst them, of course, was the effective regent of Brienne. John certainly spent some time in southern Champagne's chief cities, Troyes and Provins, in 1203 and 1205, respectively.⁹⁸ In the latter year he and Blanche arranged a noteworthy transaction. Blanche averred that her late husband had earlier ceded Mâcon without her consent. He should not have done this, since it was a part of her dowry. Blanche now bought it back from John, for 800 *l.*, with the additional proviso that John would place 400-*l.*-worth of property in fief within Blanche's dower lands. Eight leading Champenois figures stood surety for John: Garnier of Traînel, Galcher of Joigny, Simon of Joinville, Robert of Milly, Ogier of Saint-Chéron, Odo the new marshal of Champagne, Hugh of Sainte-Maure and Odo of Bar.⁹⁹ Later, as the fifth *Feoda Campanie* reveals, John was part of a similar group (which included the lords of Joinville and Châteauvillain) that stood surety for his and their close kinsman, Hugh of Broys.¹⁰⁰ These are the kinds of details that help us place John within his peer group: a charmed circle of highly prominent Champenois aristocrats.

Some months after John sold Mâcon to Blanche he took what was to prove his greatest upward step before he became king of Jerusalem. The cause was yet another death in the family. Walter III's failure to eradicate opposition in southern Italy ended by costing him his life. He was surprised and captured, and soon afterwards died of his wounds – apparently, as Abulafia says, all as a result of the simplest of ruses. One night in June 1205 a contingent of enemy soldiers managed to infiltrate Walter's camp. Cutting the ropes around his tent, they felled it on the unfortunate count before running him through.¹⁰¹

Count(-regent) of Brienne

Like his former suzerain, Theobald III, Walter III left behind a posthumous son and heir: the future Count Walter IV of Brienne. To protect her child, and to continue pressing her own claims in the kingdom of Sicily, Walter III's widow Elvira remarried: first, very swiftly, to the count of Tricarico, and later to the count of Tigrino. It was she who brought up the young Walter IV, in southern Italy.¹⁰² Walter IV was, of course, the

⁹⁷ See esp. Evergates, *Feudal Society in the Bailliage of Troyes*, 47.

⁹⁸ 'Catalogue', nos. 133, 135. ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 135.

¹⁰⁰ *Feoda Campanie* v, no. 3534, in *Documents relatifs au comté de Champagne et de Brie*.

¹⁰¹ See de Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 82–5; and Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 102.

¹⁰² De Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 86–7; Colbert-Fontainebleau, 308.

rightful heir not only to his mother's claims but also to his paternal inheritance of Brienne. At least until he came of age, though, a regency would be necessary there. In Champagne it was widely accepted that a widow could be the regent for her minor child (as Countess Blanche herself was currently doing).¹⁰³ However, the fact that Elvira never returned in person to northeastern France meant that John remained in control at Brienne, whether with her blessing or not. He was now, after all, the effective head of the Brienne family, the sole surviving mature male of the former senior line.

It is John's response to this new situation that is most intriguing, though. Although, in essence, he simply stayed in office as regent, he now assumed the title and status of count of Brienne, and this, it seems, was generally accepted. From 1205–6 John was count until Walter IV came of age in the early 1220s. At this point – again, with no sign of any serious problems – John retroceded the title and county to his nephew, at around the time that Walter came out to see him in the Latin East.¹⁰⁴ It is worth stressing that all this is not quite so drastic, or unusual, as it might appear. As Evergates has shown, John was acting within a Champenois norm (even though there *are* some cases of outright usurpation, as we shall see).¹⁰⁵ Even more than that, John had something of a 'family tradition' to support him. His kinsman Manasses had been count of Bar-sur-Seine from 1151 to 1168 as regent for his niece, Petronilla. When she came of age for marriage, Manasses promptly resigned the title and the county, returning, in fact, to his former clerical life. He subsequently rose to become bishop of Langres.¹⁰⁶

The smoothness of the eventual handover, from John to Walter, does not mean that the intervening years were trouble-free. By right of descent, the county plainly belonged to Walter. Even if Walter died young and without issue, the next heir should be William's surviving son, young Andrew, and his line. Indeed, John might even have been anxious that, when Andrew grew to maturity, Andrew would try to take the county on the grounds that he represented a more senior branch of the dynasty. In the end, though, this situation did not arise: Andrew died at around the time he came of age.¹⁰⁷ The crucial point, here, is a simple one. From the very first, John must have been aware that he could be sure of his new status for only a limited period. He may therefore have felt it advisable to

¹⁰³ See esp. Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 96–9.

¹⁰⁴ Below, 116. ¹⁰⁵ Below, 49.

¹⁰⁶ See esp. Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 215–16.

¹⁰⁷ See above, Genealogy 1; and Roserot, *Dictionnaire historique de la Champagne méridionale*, I, part 3, no. 3.

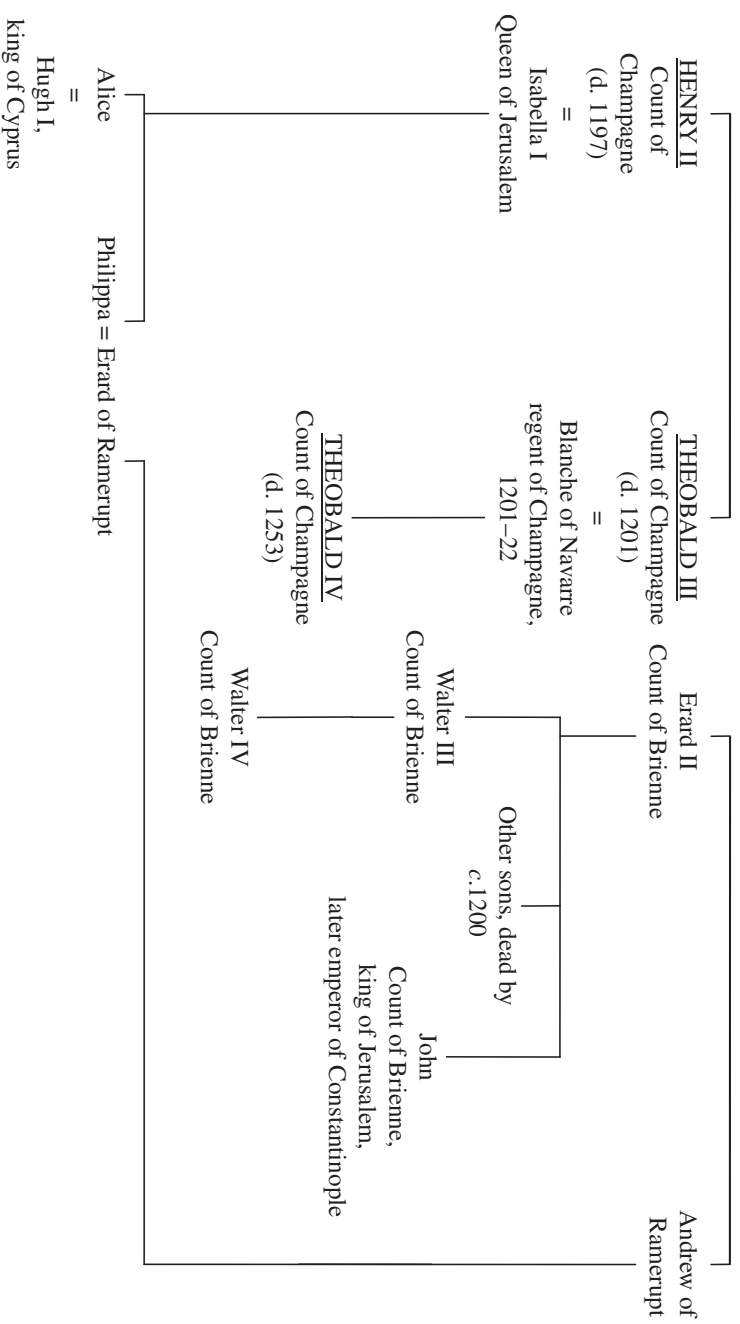
try to capitalise on it without too much delay. Marriage to a leading heiress may well have seemed the most attractive option.

The most noteworthy change, on John becoming count, was his abandonment of Walter III's war in southern Italy. It is true that the connection between the Briennes and Elvira's claims had been largely severed by Walter III's death and Elvira's remarriage. But a fundamental link did remain, in the person of the young Walter IV. If John had moved quickly, he could have tried to revive 'Walter's war'. Through it, he could have hoped to acquire land and titles in southern Italy, not merely to hold in trust for his nephew, but also for himself and his own heirs. What held him back, then, from attempting this? Perhaps what we are seeing here is the earliest clear evidence of John's characteristic caution. His aim, at this point, was clearly to preserve what he wanted more: his position as count(-regent) of Brienne. The most obvious challengers to him in that capacity were, of course, Elvira and her new husband. The best way to ward them off was simply to keep far away from southern Italy, where they were based.

Champagne as a whole remained mired in much worse political tensions resulting from the succession of a minor. These tensions were so serious largely because of the existence of a credible alternative comital line (see Genealogy 2). The infant Theobald IV was descended from a cadet branch that had acquired the county in 1197, when Count Henry II had died in the Latin East. Henry had stipulated that, should he himself never return home, the county was to pass to that cadet branch. But through his marriage to the queen of Jerusalem, Isabella I, Henry had had two surviving daughters in the Holy Land, Alice and Philippa. As the direct descendants of the senior line, it could plausibly be argued that they had a prior claim to their father's county. The matter was complicated, though, by lingering doubts as to whether Henry and Isabella's marriage had been licit, and hence whether their daughters were legitimate, and so able to inherit.¹⁰⁸

The regent, Countess Blanche, was anxiously trying to consolidate her own and her son's status and authority within Champagne. This could well explain why she approved of, or at least acquiesced in, John's assumption of the title and county of Brienne. It may well have seemed, to her, as an easy way of securing his support. John, for his part, would not have wanted challenges to the position and rights of effective regents in Champagne, any more than she did. A closer alliance, of convenience, was easily forged.

¹⁰⁸ For more on all this, see esp. below, 81–8.



Genealogy 2 The Champenois succession in the early thirteenth century

John could well have become increasingly involved in defence of Blanche and her cause during the half-decade he spent in Champagne as count of Brienne. Certainly, he was at her court at some point in 1206.¹⁰⁹ It seems that, in 1209, he was present when King Philip declared that it was the custom in France that no one's paternal inheritance could be challenged before he or she reached the age of majority (provided that the father had earlier held that inheritance without notable dissent).¹¹⁰ However, the best evidence that we have for John actively supporting Blanche dates from as late as 1209–10. Some time during these years, John and another Champenois count loyal to Blanche, William of Joigny, formally affirmed that, in their presence, a third count, William of Sancerre, had solemnly acknowledged all the fiefs that he held from her, including the county of Sancerre itself.¹¹¹

How close actually was John to Blanche, though? Seeking to explain how John later became king of Jerusalem, Colbert-Fontainebleau states that King Philip wanted John out of France. One of Philip's main reasons for this was, apparently, that the widowed countess loved John 'more than any man in the world', whilst Philip himself loved the countess 'more than anything'.¹¹² In this way, Colbert-Fontainebleau cuts down a fascinating complex of political interaction into what is plainly a tediously banal love triangle. The fact that Blanche and John cooperated for mutual benefit does not, of course, necessarily exclude a more emotional dimension to their relationship. Yet, in truth, there is little reason to believe that John was actually all that close to Blanche. He features in only a handful of the many *acta* that she issued during this period.¹¹³ This would seem to confirm that, although John was doubtless a valued supporter within Champagne, he was hardly one of Blanche's principal props, always at her side.

It is ironic, then, that the greatest challenge to Blanche eventually came from within John's own family: from Erard, the head of the Ramerupt cadet branch.¹¹⁴ As count of Brienne, John was Erard's immediate suzerain. Before going east, John certainly had some, and perhaps he had had many, dealings with him. In 1208, for example, John issued an *actum* – one of the few overlooked by d'Arbois de Jubainville, but printed

¹⁰⁹ 'Catalogue', nos. 136–7.

¹¹⁰ See *Recueil des actes de Philippe Auguste, roi de France*, ed. H.-F. Delaborde *et al.*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1916–2004), III, nos. 1088, 1338.

¹¹¹ 'Catalogue', no. 138. ¹¹² Colbert-Fontainebleau, 307.

¹¹³ D'Arbois de Jubainville summarises most of Blanche's *acta* in *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, V, nos. 550–1419.

¹¹⁴ If we bear in mind just how many interconnections there were between the principal branches of the dynasty, it is very difficult to agree with Evergates that, in effect, Erard was not really a Brienne. See *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 135, 139.

by Lalore. The *actum* records John's assent to a donation, made by Erard, to the monastery of Saint-Pierre in Troyes.¹¹⁵ Yet there is more to the irony just mentioned. When Erard eventually challenged Blanche, he did so by taking advantage of his cousin's rise to be king of Jerusalem. That rise had been promoted – perhaps even initiated – by Blanche, to make herself and her son more secure.

The call of Jerusalem

The biggest single upward step, and hence the critical phase of John's career, was his rise to be king of Jerusalem. Unfortunately, this process remains deeply obscure. We are obliged to rely heavily on the two principal narrative accounts, in Ernoul–Bernard and Colbert–Fontainebleau. It is a sign of the limitations of both of these that they have nothing at all to say about the Aragonese candidacy of 1206–7. Certainly, since 1205, the Jerusalemite elites had been looking for an eminent husband for the heiress to their kingdom, the young Maria 'la Marquise' (so called because her father had been Conrad, marquis of Montferrat, whilst her mother, from whom she inherited the crown, was Queen Isabella I of Jerusalem). The business of trying to arrange a husband for Maria involved both discussions amongst the Jerusalemites and exchanges with the West. Quite quickly, a strong candidate had emerged for Maria's hand, King Peter II of Aragon. An ambitious ruler with an eye on the Holy Land, Peter intended to wed Maria as soon as he could get his existing marriage annulled. A formal agreement was drawn up in the Holy Land, witnessed by almost all the leading Jerusalemites. Maria was to marry Peter, provided that he brought suitable military aid to the kingdom of Jerusalem by 1 November 1207. Otherwise, the deal would not be binding; and, in any event, the wedding could go ahead only if approved by the pope and the Church.¹¹⁶ Innocent III made a point of giving proper consideration to the arguments for and against Peter's current marriage, though. Innocent's determination to do this properly made the whole business of securing an annulment very slow, effectively ending Peter's candidature.¹¹⁷ This left the field open – as it proved – for John, who could only really be something of a letdown compared to the king of Aragon. Yet none of this gets the barest mention, either in Ernoul–Bernard or in

¹¹⁵ *Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes*, V, 'Cartulaire de Saint-Pierre', no. 123.

¹¹⁶ See esp. *UKJ*, III, DD. 645, 773.

¹¹⁷ See esp. D. Smith, *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon: The Limits of Papal Authority* (Aldershot, 2004), 71–4. I would like to thank Professor Smith here for all his expert guidance on this subject.

Colbert–Fontainebleau. These sources do not give us a full and proper account. We are obliged to fill in with guesswork.

In the run-up to John becoming king-elect, there was a great deal of significant contact between the Champagne region and the Latin East. The main reason for this is plain. The principal threat to Blanche's position as regent, and to her infant son's succession as count of Champagne, was provided by the daughters of the former count, Henry II, who were now growing up in the kingdom of Jerusalem. Blanche decided to press for the implementation of an earlier scheme, by which the daughters would be married to leading Latin Eastern figures. The calculation was presumably that they and their husbands would then be less likely to come west to cause trouble. (It has to be said that, with respect to one of the daughters at least, this strategy did work for almost a decade before it backfired.)¹¹⁸ In pursuit of her policy, Blanche recruited powerful allies in the East – above all, the respective regents of the kingdoms of Jerusalem and Cyprus, John of Ibelin and Walter of Montbéliard.¹¹⁹ In 1206 Walter induced Innocent III himself to press for the marriages to take place.¹²⁰ Not long afterwards, Blanche dispatched her own trusted treasurer to the East, bearing what was, in effect, a handsome bribe. On 5 December 1207 Archbishop Clarembald of Tyre issued an *actum* confirming that, if Alice, the elder of the two daughters, were to die before her marriage to the king of Cyprus, then her younger sister, Philippa, would marry him instead.¹²¹

It is surely no accident that, in the aftermath of all this, John emerged as king-elect of Jerusalem. With Champagne looming so large at just the right time, his could well have been the kind of name that was swirling about, as a possible candidate, in the Latin East. Maybe Blanche was already proposing him. She would have had good reason to do something like this. Although John had served her well in Champagne, he could now be still more useful to her in the Holy Land. As king of Jerusalem, and hence as head of the Jerusalemite royal family, John would be at least the *de facto* guardian of Alice and Philippa. He could personally see to it that they were safely married off. In short, however John was actually selected to be king, it is hard not to see Blanche and her problems behind it, one way or another. At the very least, her promotion of John, in the earliest

¹¹⁸ BC, I, doc. c-23; d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 223–5, 256–64.

¹¹⁹ See esp. P. W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191–1374* (Cambridge, 1991), 32, 43.

¹²⁰ See *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani, 1097–1291*, compiled R. Röhrich, 2 vols. (Innsbruck, 1893–1904) (inc. *Additamentum*), no. 811.

¹²¹ UKJ, III, D. 775; Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 5.

stages of his candidacy, could well explain much of how it gathered momentum.

How, though, did John actually become king-elect? Ernoul–Bernard and Colbert–Fontainebleau agree that (after the ‘Peter of Aragon’ debacle?) the Jerusalemite elites convened en masse, either to select a new king for themselves or, at least, to decide on how one should be chosen. According to Colbert–Fontainebleau, it was resolved that the French king should select a suitable figure to marry their lady, who could ‘protect and maintain the kingdom of Jerusalem’. Philip promptly chose John of Brienne, but his motives for doing so were suspect.¹²² There are various reasons for questioning the veracity of the above account. If John really was selected in this way, it is surprising to find that contemporary royalist French *literati* do not make more of it – of the French ruler being asked to choose the new king of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Colbert–Fontainebleau’s version of events neatly reflects its own previous account of how John’s brother, Walter III, had been chosen, at Philip’s council of Melun, to marry Elvira of Sicily. Perhaps our chronicler is overplaying the similarity between the two developments.

Ernoul–Bernard’s account looks rather more satisfactory.¹²³ It says that it was in the East, at the Jerusalemite council, that a conveniently unnamed knight first proposed that Count John of Brienne should ‘be made king, and marry their lady’. When John heard, in due course, that the council had agreed upon him, he gave the appropriate, humble response that he would seek ‘counsel’ about it. He took the matter to the king of France, and proceeded to secure his assent.¹²⁴

Who would really have been pushing John’s candidacy in the Latin East? Far and away the most obvious person is John’s cousin, Walter of Montbéliard, who had himself risen to become regent of Cyprus through marriage. It is important to realise just how closely intertwined the kingdoms of Jerusalem and Cyprus were at this point. They had only recently been separated, following a period of ‘personal union’ under one king (Aimery of Lusignan, 1198–1205), and various leading figures held land, title, and position in both realms. Edbury has noted that, whilst Walter plainly had a hand in several important marriages arranged during his regency in Cyprus, there is no clear evidence that he had a role in John’s, the one that would eventually benefit Walter himself the most.¹²⁵ Whilst

¹²² Colbert–Fontainebleau, 306–7.

¹²³ Ernoul–Bernard’s version of events gets brief confirmation from Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 890; and Robert of Auxerre, *Chronicon*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 26, 273.

¹²⁴ Ernoul–Bernard, 407–8. ¹²⁵ Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 32.

Walter may not have foreseen all that far ahead, he surely did see general advantage for himself in his cousin becoming king of Jerusalem. It should not be forgotten that, although Walter was based on Cyprus, he was also still the constable of the kingdom of Jerusalem.¹²⁶ Thus, he probably sent a proxy to the great council that was deciding that kingdom's future. In sum, Walter's firm backing could well have been crucial in getting John accepted by the Jerusalemites.

For all the fervency of Walter's backing from Cyprus, John's cause would not have prospered if it had not had a solid, committed 'party' supporting it in the kingdom of Jerusalem itself. Such a grouping, though, was there to hand. The recent reign of Count Henry II of Champagne in the kingdom of Jerusalem (1192–7) had witnessed a brief flurry of settlement there, creating a small but well-placed 'Champenois cluster'. The cluster's hand was strengthened by the fact that Champenois involvement in the East had grown, not contracted, after Henry's sudden, accidental death in 1197.¹²⁷ By 1207–8, a decade later, the Champenois cluster in the kingdom was headed by great clerical figures, such as Archbishop Clarembald of Tyre and the chancellor, Ralph of Merencourt; and, in the secular sphere, by Aimar of Layron, lord of Caesarea through marriage.¹²⁸ Aimar was the secular head of the Jerusalemite legation sent back to France, probably to conclude the negotiations with John there.¹²⁹ It is quite believable that Clarembald, Ralph and Aimar, and Walter of Montbéliard, were functioning as a kind of organised party, pushing for John's accession.

Moreover, as we have already noted, there *is* some telling evidence that John's principal backers, in both West and East, were concerting their action. Whilst it was Blanche who most wanted Alice and Philippa married in the East, we can see Archbishop Clarembald, and even more so Walter of Montbéliard, working to bring this about.¹³⁰

For John's candidacy to be successful, though, he would have to win over far more than an already converted hard-core minority. So what were the Jerusalemites really looking for in a prospective 'king(-consort)'?¹³¹ We may answer with some confidence: much the same as they had been

¹²⁶ Ibid., esp. 41. ¹²⁷ See esp. Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, ch. 1.

¹²⁸ Unfortunately, it is not clear whether Clarembald was a close kinsman of the Briennes. See esp. the analysis by H. E. Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, 2 vols. (Hanover, 1996), I, 294–301.

¹²⁹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 306; Hamilton, 'King consorts of Jerusalem and their entourages', 15.

¹³⁰ *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 811; *UKJ*, III, D. 775.

¹³¹ This term has been adapted from Hamilton, 'King consorts of Jerusalem and their entourages'.

looking for in the likes of Peter of Aragon and Henry of Champagne, stretching all the way back to the first king(-consort) of Jerusalem, Fulk of Anjou (d. 1143). Undoubtedly, the new king's primary task would be to maintain and protect the existing royal line (an ideal of 'joint rule' that dated from the time of Fulk), and to sire new heirs from it. The new king would be expected to hold the kingdom for the foremost of these heirs, certainly until the latter grew up. The new king would exercise the royal prerogative, and so ensure that the crown preserved its presence and role, both within the realm itself and beyond. Ideally, he should have sufficient status and resources of his own – or, failing that, at least the appropriate connections – to mobilise large-scale Western support for the beleaguered kingdom. In fact if not in name, then, what was really being looked for was, perhaps, less a king than an eminent regent-cum-sperm-donor. As Fulk and several of his successors had found, there could be trouble as and when a newcomer king(-consort) tried to assert himself.¹³²

John met enough of these criteria to explain his selection. Now, therefore, we focus on what he had to offer. Mature yet unmarried, he was available to 'marry the lady, and [so] become king'. He was surely keen to take on the job, lacking long-term prospects at home. He was plainly ambitious, probably looking to make as advantageous a marriage as possible. Moreover, he was suitable, in a variety of ways. He was experienced at protecting and maintaining the rights of others, whilst bearing 'their' title. He appears to have been of proven military prowess. Perhaps most importantly, though, John may well have seemed 'the best that there was' to keep alive the outstanding features of the two previous reigns by effective king(-consorts), Henry of Champagne (uncrowned ruler, 1192–7) and Aimery of Lusignan (king of Jerusalem and Cyprus, 1198–1205). The Jerusalemites could not have the count of Champagne now, but they could have the 'next best thing' – a great lord from the region, close to the countess. John could well have seemed very well placed to cement continuing good relations with Cyprus, as close kinsman to the regent there, Walter of Montbéliard.¹³³

The glaring deficiency of John's candidacy was plainly that, unlike Henry of Champagne and Peter of Aragon, John himself was not of the

¹³² For Fulk's career as king, see esp. H. E. Mayer, 'Studies in the history of Queen Melisande of Jerusalem', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26 (1972), 95–182, and 'Angevins versus Normans: the new men of King Fulk of Jerusalem', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133 (1989), 1–25; J. Riley-Smith, 'King Fulk of Jerusalem and the "Sultan of Babylon"', in B. Kedar, J. Riley-Smith and R. Hiestand, eds., *Montjoie: Studies in Crusade History in Honour of Hans Eberhard Mayer* (Aldershot, 1997), 55–66; and J. Phillips, *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades* (London, 2009), 50–74.

¹³³ But see below, 76–8, for what followed when the young king, Hugh, came of age.

very highest – that is, ‘princely’ – status. Colbert–Fontainebleau keeps grinding away at the implications of this point. What was required was a *preudomme* (in effect, an ideal aristocrat) who could guard and maintain the kingdom of Jerusalem.¹³⁴ But this ‘great dignity’ was above John. ‘A higher-ranking and richer man would have been better able to bear... the poverty of the land [as] the count [of Brienne] was not a rich man, holding the county of Brienne only in regency.’¹³⁵ It is true that John was a lesser lord than both his predecessors in the job. Henry II of Champagne had been a figure of Latin-Christendom-wide stature, whilst King Aimery of Cyprus had been the ruler of Jerusalem’s new sister kingdom. But it was not always possible for the kingdom of Jerusalem to ‘get’ a princely figure – and here it is worth remembering the variety of individuals whom the Jerusalemites had seriously considered for the crown on previous occasions, especially since 1174.¹³⁶ The ‘next best thing’ would be a not-quite-first-rank aristocrat with connections, not only to leading Latin Eastern political players but also to powerful Western patrons. Here we return, once again, to the idea of how crucial Blanche’s support must have been for John in the earliest stages of his candidacy. Yet it is noteworthy that the above description, of a ‘next best thing’, fits not only John but also his most maligned predecessor as king of Jerusalem, Guy of Lusignan (d. 1194). Guy, and his brother Aimery, were younger sons of a French count of essentially regional stature and importance. But local connections in the Holy Land, and family links back to a Western great power, the Angevin King Henry II of England, made Guy at least a plausible candidate as future king(-consort) of Jerusalem in the early 1180s.¹³⁷ In this way, and in others, John’s selection may be described as a less contentious rerun of the way in which Guy had been chosen to be king, thirty years earlier.¹³⁸

Once John had been selected in the kingdom of Jerusalem, maybe in early 1208, careful negotiations took place between the Jerusalemites and him. We know most about the Jerusalemite legation sent to France, headed by Aimar of Layron and the bishop of Acre.¹³⁹ It is clear that both sides, in this business, had to move circumspectly – something

¹³⁴ The idea of *preudomme* is examined in some detail by D. Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France, 900–1300* (Harlow, 2005), 29–80.

¹³⁵ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 306–8.

¹³⁶ For this, see esp. B. Hamilton, *The Leper King and His Heirs: Baldwin IV and the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, 2000); P. W. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Woodbridge, 1997), 18–23; and J. Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1174–1277* (London, 1973), 152.

¹³⁷ See below, footnote 141.

¹³⁸ Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 32.

¹³⁹ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 306–8.

recently underlined by the ‘Peter of Aragon’ fiasco. The precise position and rights of king(-consorts) had long been a matter of great importance in the kingdom of Jerusalem, ever since the days of Fulk of Anjou, the first to fill this role. But it had become much more of an issue in the last twenty years or so, following the effective deposition of Guy of Lusignan.¹⁴⁰ Guy acutely divided opinion, even before he became king(-consort) in 1186. The disastrous defeat at the battle of Hattin, the next year, forcefully reopened the question of whether or not he was suitable to rule. Guy’s hard work to try to stay in control was ruined when his wife, Queen Sibylla, died without surviving children, which meant that Guy was left blocking the ‘rightful succession’ of the throne to her half-sister, Isabella. In truth, he only really lost the crown when the key figure in the Holy Land at the time – King Richard the Lionheart of England – stopped backing Guy’s assertion that he was still king of Jerusalem for life.¹⁴¹ (The throne thus passed to Isabella and her husband, Conrad of Montferrat, the parents of Maria, who eventually married our John.) These events were well within the memory of some members of the current political elite, such as Ralph of Tiberias, seneschal of the kingdom of Jerusalem.¹⁴² Mayer has suggested that the Jerusalemite regency government went to the rare lengths of sending out a blank, sealed *actum* to France for the marriage contract between John and Maria. This suggests that the government had given plenipotentiary powers to its envoys, who presumably brought the *actum* out with them to the West. If the above is correct, then it is a real blow that this document does not survive.¹⁴³ But, whatever was actually discussed, agreed, and set down in writing, the issue of John’s precise position and rights plainly remained a live one.¹⁴⁴

Perhaps the Jerusalemites signed on the dotted line only when John received the explicit backing of Philip Augustus. Despite the remarkable silence of French royalist sources on relations between Philip and John at this time, Philip’s assent would have demonstrated to the Jerusalemites that John was indeed capable of enlisting the support of the very greatest figures in the West. However, Colbert-Fontainebleau may be on the right lines when it suggests that Philip’s motives for backing John were not entirely laudable.¹⁴⁵ As has been suggested above, John could well have become an increasingly motivated supporter of Countess Blanche. Philip,

¹⁴⁰ For a recent survey of the latter subject, see esp. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 18–23.

¹⁴¹ This survey of Guy’s career is derived chiefly from Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 23–9.

¹⁴² Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 156–8.

¹⁴³ UKJ, III, D. *776. ¹⁴⁴ See esp. below, 68–71. ¹⁴⁵ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 307.

too, was backing her, but he was also looking to exploit her difficulties.¹⁴⁶ Perceiving John's activity in Champagne, supporting Blanche – and having surely not forgotten the Briennes' opposition to himself in the late 1190s – Philip may well have seen in John something of a nuisance. For Philip, then, John becoming king-elect was largely a rerun of the events surrounding Walter III's marriage a decade earlier. Once again, Philip seized his opportunity both to assert his lordship over the count of Brienne and also to encourage the count to pursue grand prospects far away from northern France. This strategy certainly worked, and its effect was to make John a client of the French crown.

Having acquired the French king's backing, maybe in mid- to late 1208, John could well have gone on to the papal Curia in 1209.¹⁴⁷ It was, perhaps, after meeting John there that Innocent III wrote to Philip Augustus on 23 April – the earliest surviving acknowledgement that John had become king-elect. The pope's letter stresses that John's elevation is an honour to Philip, and to his entire kingdom. This was a heaven-sent opportunity for Philip and wealthy France to save the Holy Land.¹⁴⁸ It is telling, and understandable, that Innocent's reaction was thus focused on Philip, rather than on John himself.

Innocent was ready to support the new king-elect, perhaps seeing him as a 'new start' in the kingdom of Jerusalem. Doubtless, the pope recalled the early triumphs of John's brother, Walter III, in southern Italy, and hoped that John could achieve as much in the Holy Land. Innocent may also have warmed to the idea that John could be expected to renew close ties between the kingdoms of Jerusalem and Cyprus. Above all, though, as his letter to Philip makes clear, the pope was well aware that John was largely a protégé of the French king, and of Countess Blanche too. If Philip, especially, was not going to be involved in the Albigensian Crusade that Innocent had recently proclaimed, which was directed against the problem of heresy in the south of France, then the pope wanted him heavily involved in 'the recovery of the Holy Land'.¹⁴⁹

Innocent's attitude towards John is perhaps best revealed by the manner in which the pope provided him with generous financial assistance. Able to dole out cash far more readily than manpower, Innocent had collected 40,000 marks 'for the needs of the Holy Land'. But he did not simply hand this massive sum over to John. Utilising the financial networks of the

¹⁴⁶ For this, see d'Arbois de Jubainville's detailed account of Blanche's regency in *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 101–97.

¹⁴⁷ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 308. ¹⁴⁸ *PL*, CCXVI, no. 27, cols. 36–7.

¹⁴⁹ See esp. M. Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (Oxford, 2008), 6–7, 59–60, 63; and R. Rist, *The Papacy and Crusading in Europe, 1198–1245* (London, 2009), 47, 62–5, 70.

principal military orders, Innocent dispatched the money direct to the East – specifying, moreover, that King John could disburse it only with the assent of the patriarch-legate of Jerusalem, and of the masters of the Temple and the Hospital. For the pope, then, John would be just one of the leading figures in the kingdom of Jerusalem, and, of the others mentioned here, all are clerical. This is a sign of how the papacy saw government in the Holy Land – a theme that we will come back to.¹⁵⁰ In his letter to the French king, Innocent tried to pressurise Philip into a parallel effort to help the Holy Land.¹⁵¹ Colbert–Fontainebleau unfairly waters down Innocent’s generosity, though, stating that he gave a loan of only 40,000 *l. tournois*, secured against John’s county of Brienne. According to the same source, Philip then comprehensively outdid the pope by providing John with an unqualified gift of 40,000 *l. parisis*.¹⁵² In truth, the French king probably did give a substantial sum of money, to add to Innocent’s. Philip could well have played on Jerusalemite hopes, directed towards himself, to get John agreed as king. Now that John was king-elect, Philip was not actually prepared to do all that much. But he may well have done his bit, at least, by helping to provide his protégé with a tidy war chest.

John planned his arrival in the East to coincide with the expiry of the existing truce between his new kingdom ‘and the Saracens’.¹⁵³ This meant that he had more than a year, after April 1209, to prepare what we might call the ‘entourage-crusade’ that would accompany him to war. This begs the question: how far did John and his army take on the increasingly standardised paraphernalia of crusading, so that his expedition became ‘a crusade’ in official terms? In addition, was it regarded as that self-same crusade to the Holy Land that the pope had proclaimed only a few months earlier, in *Utinam dominus* (December 1208)? By far the best account of John’s expedition available to us, in Colbert–Fontainebleau, certainly does describe it in crusading terms, using words such as ‘croisé[s]’ and ‘pelerins’. But possibly this reflects little more than the fact that John and his men went from the West to the Holy Land to fight the infidel.¹⁵⁴ Although it is possible to quibble, it seems best to accept Colbert–Fontainebleau’s mode of designation, and so this expedition is referred to, from here on, as the ‘1210–11 Crusade’.

John’s efforts at recruitment plainly focused on his homeland, north-eastern France. It is tempting to suppose that he achieved so little primarily because the region was then in the aftermath of recruiting for the Albigensian Crusade, which mustered at Lyons in June 1209. But the

¹⁵⁰ See esp. below, 71–6. ¹⁵¹ *PL*, CCXVI, no. 27, cols. 36–7; see also no. 28, cols. 37–8.

¹⁵² Colbert–Fontainebleau, 308. ¹⁵³ See *ibid.*, 308, and below, 54–5.

¹⁵⁴ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 308, 310, 317.

Albigensian Crusade was not so much of a problem as one might suppose. Part of its unique attraction was that its locus of operations was so much nearer at hand than usual: the south of France rather than the eastern Mediterranean. Hence, it may well have attracted many who were disinclined to take the far longer, riskier and more expensive route to the Holy Land itself. We may well doubt, then, whether a vast proportion of those who enlisted for the Albigensian Crusade would otherwise have gone with John. Yet it is beyond doubt that the two crusades could and did become rivals. Innocent III himself was obliged to step in to prevent the Holy Land from losing out. In November 1209 he refused Simon de Montfort's call for a renewal of the Albigensian Crusade, on the grounds that this would jeopardise the appeal for Jerusalem.¹⁵⁵

The real problem was that John himself was 'not quite of the first rank' – and, in the event, he could attract no one of princely stature to go on crusade with him. This was reflected in the size of the host that he could muster: a fair number of knights, but not big by the standards of major crusades.¹⁵⁶ The identities of the expedition's leaders show it to have been the rather limited venture that it was. None of these lords was particularly great, or 'very rich', as Colbert-Fontainebleau complains.¹⁵⁷ Most of them were close kinsmen, regional *compatriotes*, or both, of John himself. They included the 'crusade enthusiast' Milo IV, count of Bar-sur-Seine; Bartholomew of Choiseul, who may well have been related to the Briennes through his mother; and James of Durnay.¹⁵⁸ James was the most important of those who remained with John in the East after the vast majority had returned home. James had probably decided to make a new career for himself, with John, because his uncle had earlier effectively dispossessed him of the significant Champenois lordship of Chacenay.¹⁵⁹ John rewarded James for staying on with the office of marshal of the kingdom of Jerusalem.¹⁶⁰ In short, John's ample array of connections to Western great powers did not bear much fruit in the 1210–11 Crusade. There was clearly scope for the beginnings of Jerusalemite disillusionment with John, right from the very start of his reign.

Just before his departure for the Holy Land, John seems to have been involved in a sudden rush of donations to religious houses. It looks as if all concerned were anxious to get such matters properly dealt with before the count of Brienne finally left.¹⁶¹ John himself was doubtless keen to do

¹⁵⁵ *PL*, CCXVI, no. 123, cols. 152–3.

¹⁵⁶ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 308. For more on this, see below, 55.

¹⁵⁷ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 308, 317.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 317; Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 169, 224–5.

¹⁵⁹ See esp. *ibid.*, 170, 230–1. ¹⁶⁰ Below, 66–7.

¹⁶¹ 'Catalogue', nos. 140–4; Appendix 1, below, no. 4.

what he could to earn divine blessing before setting off. In Colbert–Fontainebleau’s florid account, he describes his mission to the Holy Land in the following pious terms: ‘[T]o take up this great honour...the crown and the kingdom...where Our Lord Jesus Christ was crowned.’¹⁶²

The most significant decision that John made before departure, though, was to retain formally the county of Brienne, as count(-regent) for the young Walter IV. John thus became the first *de jure* king of Jerusalem to rule in the East whilst also holding onto a substantial Western lordship. This is his particular marker on the road that would soon lead to the ‘cross-Mediterranean agglomerations’ of John’s successor as king of Jerusalem, Frederick II, and later of Charles of Anjou.¹⁶³ Whilst there are various ways to account for this decision of John’s, perhaps the best is simply to note that, once again, he was following in the footsteps of Count Henry II of Champagne. When Henry had become *de facto* king of Jerusalem whilst on crusade in 1192, he had seen no reason to divest himself of the title and rights of count of Champagne. In effect, he had made a point of not doing this. For the rest of his life, Champagne was ruled by the regent that he himself had earlier appointed. Yet, throughout this period, Henry, in the East, usually styled himself ‘count palatine of Troyes’ – that is, to all intents and purposes, count of Champagne.¹⁶⁴

During his absence in the East, John would evidently need someone to oversee the county of Brienne for him: essentially, a regent for the regent. Who could have fulfilled this role, since mature Brienne males were now in short supply? The most obvious candidate was John’s cousin Erard, head of the Ramerupt cadet branch. But, if Erard did indeed take on this role in 1210, then his stint in office may not have lasted long, and ended in eye-opening circumstances.

¹⁶² Colbert–Fontainebleau, 307. It is worth noting Nielsen’s suggestion here that by 1209, at the latest, John had introduced the Brienne heraldic lion, which eventually stuck as the family device. However, the evidence is too inconclusive to say this with confidence. It is clear, though, that the Brienne lion had emerged by 1209, and that it was used across the family by the 1220s. The only question is how far back it goes before that. See M.-A. Nielsen, ‘Du comté de Champagne aux royaumes d’Orient: sceaux et armoiries des comtes de Brienne’, in D. Coulon, C. Otten-Froux, P. Pagès and D. Valérian, eds., *Chemins d’outre-mer: études sur la Méditerranée médiévale offertes à Michel Balard*, vol. II (Paris, 2004), 594–8. For more on the ‘lion’ theme, see esp. below, 185.

¹⁶³ This phrase has been adapted from C. Tyerman, *God’s War: A New History of the Crusades* (London, 2006), 197.

¹⁶⁴ UK⁷, II, DD. 568–*587.

2 Ruling from Acre and Tyre

The first half of John's reign as king of Jerusalem – from his arrival, marriage and coronation in 1210 to the coming of the Fifth Crusade in 1217 – is rather a 'black hole' period in the history of his new kingdom, much neglected by historians. The main reason for this is that the years 1210 to 1217 are particularly badly served by the extant narrative source material – above all, by Ernoul–Bernard and Colbert–Fontainebleau.¹

Yet this period is much more than simply the run-up to the Fifth Crusade. The main reasons for its importance, for our purposes, all stem from one central fact: that this proved to be John's only lengthy period of rule in his kingdom proper. He spent most of the rest of his reign elsewhere – first in Egypt, and then back in the West, as we shall see.² This makes 1210 to 1217 the last prolonged period of rule by a king of Jerusalem in his kingdom before the start of the Hohenstaufen epoch, during which Jerusalemite royal power took a massive nosedive from which it never recovered.³ John was, in fact, the last king of Jerusalem to reside habitually in any part of the Latin East until the Lusignans of Cyprus succeeded the Hohenstaufen in 1269. By then, though, the kingdom of Jerusalem 'had gone a long way towards fragmenting into its component lordships', meaning that its kingship was but a shadow of its former self.⁴ Moreover, John was the last king of Jerusalem, at all, to regard that kingdom as his primary base. Subsequent kings were all firmly centred either in the West or on Cyprus. Putting all this together, 1210–17 represents, in a way, our last chance to see the kingship of Jerusalem in something like full flower. What we have here is an opportunity to assess the situation and strength of the Jerusalemite monarchy, just before the rot really seemed to set in.

¹ Ernoul–Bernard, 409–11; Colbert–Fontainebleau, 311–21.

² It should be noted, however, that the Egyptian city of Damietta did formally become a part of the kingdom of Jerusalem following its capture by the crusaders in 1219. See below, 103–11.

³ For this, see esp. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 40–76.

⁴ Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 91.

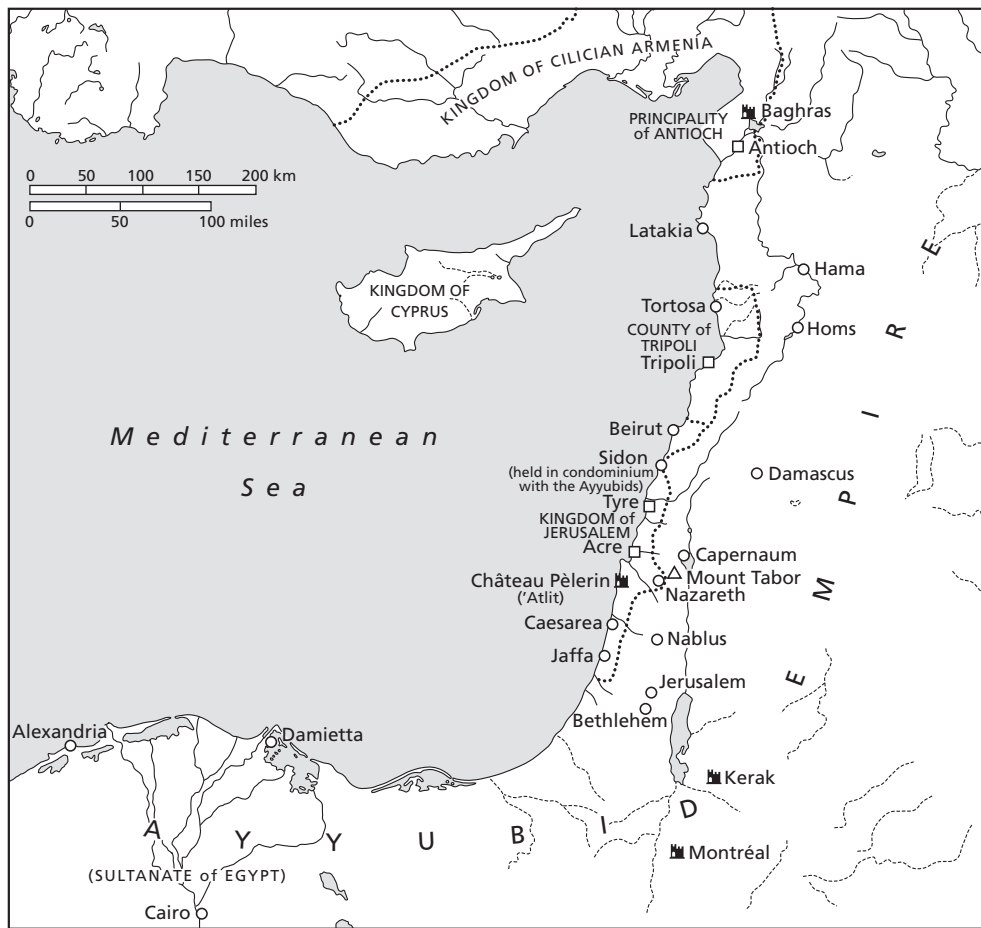
This chapter concludes by bringing out the true impact of what we may call the ‘Erard of Brienne affair’ in the kingdom of Jerusalem. This permits a demonstration, in microcosm, of some of this book’s contentions about how and why the Latin Eastern and Western political theatres were so intimately connected in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. All of the above is intended to pave the way towards solving the wider problem of how to conceptualise the kingdom of Jerusalem between 1192 and 1225, a period that remains highly troublesome for modern scholars to interpret.

War and truce

The ‘first’ kingdom of Jerusalem had ended with the loss of almost everything – above all, its original *raison d’être*, the Holy City itself – to Saladin in 1187. The colossal Western effort that was the Third Crusade (1187–92) meant that something was salvaged from the wreck: a thin coastal strip barely twenty miles wide, dominated by the twin ports of Acre and Tyre but, crucially, lacking the city of Jerusalem. As had been the case, in fact, since 1186, this tenuous rump kingdom was headed by a succession of queen-heiresses, who required consorts to rule with – or, effectively, *for* – them. (This ideal of joint rule, stretching back to the first king(-consort) of Jerusalem, Fulk of Anjou, was important. It is clear that, for the brief two-year period when they were ruling together, John’s new wife, Queen Maria, consented to most of the *acta* that he issued as king; and something like this continued between John and their daughter, Isabella II, once she was old enough to express her assent.)⁵ Queen Isabella I of Jerusalem’s last two consorts had been Count Henry II of Champagne, 1192–7, and Aimery of Lusignan, king of Cyprus, 1198–1205. On Aimery and Isabella’s deaths in 1205, the crowns were separated. Whilst Cyprus passed to Aimery’s son by an earlier marriage, Hugh, the kingdom of Jerusalem went to Isabella’s daughter by her second husband, Maria ‘la Marquise’, and both Hugh and Maria were minors. In the five-year gap before John became king, whilst his future wife, Maria, was still under-age, the kingdom of Jerusalem was ruled by her uncle, the regent John of Ibelin.⁶ We begin the analysis of John of Brienne’s reign with the 1210–11 Crusade, since this set the tone for the rest of it – certainly until 1217.

⁵ For this, see esp. *UKJ*, III, DD. 626, *627–8, 640, 647, *648–9. Maria also consented to much that her regency government did before she became queen (DD. 644–5, *646).

⁶ For a brief summary of the situation in the kingdom of Jerusalem at this time, see Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 30–2.



Map 2 The Near East during John's reign as king of Jerusalem

The Jerusalemites could well have been hoping for much from the 1210–11 Crusade. Despite the obvious limitations of his own stature, John had emerged more than a year earlier as the West's approved candidate for the throne of Jerusalem, and he had spent the period since then preparing his expedition. There may well have been widespread hopes in the East that the strong backing of the pope, the king of France and the countess of Champagne would more than compensate for John himself being of 'not quite the first rank'. Colbert-Fontainebleau's account of John's reception at Acre certainly looks overdone, but it nevertheless does seem to indicate the excited anticipation generated over the course of the preceding year.⁷

⁷ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 310.



Illustration 3 One of John's seals as king of Jerusalem

Inflated rumour of the new crusade could well have alarmed the Sultan al-Adil, Saladin's eventual successor as head of the vast Ayyubid 'empire' encompassing Egypt, Syria and Palestine (including, of course, the city of Jerusalem itself).⁸ Just before the 1210–11 Crusade reached the Latin East, it would seem that al-Adil sent to the Jerusalemites' effective capital, Acre, offering the Christians slightly advantageous terms in return for a renewal of the truce of 1204. Besides the maintenance of the present status quo, the sultan offered ten additional *casals* – rural settlements – to the Jerusalemites. According to Colbert-Fontainebleau, the regent (John of Ibelin), the barons of the kingdom, the Hospitallers and the

⁸ See esp. *ibid.*, 309–10.

Teutonic Order were all in favour of accepting the terms. However, both the clergy and the master of the Temple spoke out strongly against the sultan's offer, and this seeming minority carried the day.⁹ They may well have argued that it was wrong to bind the new king's hands by committing him to a truce that he had not agreed to. But their main point, surely, was that John was expected to arrive very soon in the East, bringing with him a (hopefully sizeable) crusader host. There was an enticing prospect of much more to be won than the sultan was offering at present. This was a reasonable view. Assisted, in some way at least, by major crusades from the West, the Jerusalemite had made limited but by no means insignificant gains in their most recent short conflicts with the Ayyubids, which had ended in truces in 1198 and 1204.¹⁰

If Colbert-Fontainebleau is right, John brought with him some 300 knights.¹¹ If Marshall's estimate is correct, this would have temporarily swelled the kingdom's 'pool of available knighthood' by over 20 per cent.¹² Nevertheless, since none of these new knights was 'particularly rich' or great, the sum total of John's host – other mounted and foot soldiers included – probably remained quite modest. The use that John made of this army, in 1210–11, certainly reinforces this impression. But it is worth noting that John was, by nature, a cautious commander.¹³ Moreover, since this was his first campaign in a new environment in which Latin manpower was invariably scarce, the crucial thing was to get his forces back safely, rather than to take risks in the hope of great triumphs.

Both sides in this war favoured the same strategy, of carefully targeted raiding. Such incursions could often be highly lucrative, quite besides the possibility of permanently annexing occupied territory. Naturally, the enemy's powerhouses presented the most enticing goals. One of al-Adil's sons, al-Mu'azzam, seized the opportunity presented by John and Maria's coronation at Tyre to swoop on Acre whilst it was relatively unprotected.¹⁴ Al-Mu'azzam's intelligent opportunism was dramatically resisted by the Jerusalemite barons who had been left behind to garrison the city, though. The Muslims soon gave up and 'returned to [their own]

⁹ It is perhaps telling that this council seems to have taken place at the patriarch's house (ibid., 309). Ernoul-Bernard, 409, simply states that the Saracens broke the truce as soon as they heard that there was a new king at Acre.

¹⁰ For these conflicts, see esp. B. Kedar, 'The Fourth Crusade's second front', in A. Laiou, ed., *Urbs Capta: The Fourth Crusade and Its Consequences* (Paris, 2005), 89–110.

¹¹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 308.

¹² C. Marshall, *Warfare in the Latin East, 1192–1291* (Cambridge, 1992), 52; L. Ross, 'Relations between the Latin East and western Europe' (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2003), 45.

¹³ Below, 100, 177–8. ¹⁴ For more on the coronation, see below, 72.

country', though not before considerable damage had been done to the littoral.¹⁵ King John riposted with a *chevauchée* of his own, as far as the rich *casal* of 'Visse' (whose precise location is not clear). His force burned many other *casals* nearby before returning to Acre, laden with spoil.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the Christians' most noteworthy attack on the Ayyubids came not in the Holy Land but in Egypt, by sea. The Westerners had long been aware of Egypt's potential to dominate the southern Levant. Consequently, from time to time they had sought either to seize the hugely prosperous Nile delta or at least to cripple it. This strategy would reach full flowering in John's reign, with the Fifth Crusade.¹⁷ During the Jerusalemites' last war against the Ayyubids, in May 1204, King Aimery had sent a fleet against the delta. This could well have been significant in driving al-Adil to make concessions shortly afterwards.¹⁸ Now, in 1211, King John tried the same tactic as his predecessor. The mission was entrusted to his new right-hand-man, Walter of Montbéliard, who had considerable experience of seaborne expeditions.¹⁹ We will see shortly how Walter fled to his cousin, John, at the end of his regency on Cyprus, and was quickly established at the top in the new king's service.²⁰ Walter's strike force plainly lacked the punch to sack any of the major cities on the delta. So he simply sailed up a nearby branch of the Nile and raided wherever he could, apparently until he came to the *casal* of 'Boré' (Boru, near Damietta). Thereupon, having spread alarm across the delta, Walter and his flotilla returned to Acre.²¹

Unlike what had happened in 1204, though, this raid was not followed by a rapid, moderately advantageous end to the war. Colbert-Fontainebleau suggests that al-Adil soon realised that he had comparatively little to fear from this crusade, and so the Ayyubids pushed ahead with their plans to fortify the key strategic site of Mount Tabor, 'only seven leagues from Acre'.²² In mid-1211, having fulfilled their crusade vows and 'been away from their land for a year', the vast majority of John's crusaders 'returned to their [own] country'.²³ Meanwhile, a new and particularly bitter round of conflict had opened in the north between King Leo of Cilician Armenia and the Templars. Innocent III promptly confirmed a sentence of excommunication against Leo in May 1211. Around this time, we may guess, John made a truce with the sultan, before turning his attention to the struggle in the north.²⁴

¹⁵ See R. S. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (Albany, NY, 1977), 136.

¹⁶ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 312–13, 316. ¹⁷ See esp. below, ch. 3.

¹⁸ Kedar, 'The Fourth Crusade's second front', 100–3.

¹⁹ See esp. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 42–3. ²⁰ Below, 77.

²¹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 316. ²² *Ibid.*, 316–17. ²³ *Ibid.*, 317. ²⁴ Below, 78–80.

The truce with the sultan was to last six years, just as the previous one had. Nevertheless, its terms do mark a turning point in the kingdom of Jerusalem's recent history. Since 1197–8, short wars against the Ayyubids had yielded fairly small but worthwhile acquisitions. However, this time the war – John's crusade – produced no gains at all. The clearest indicator as to which side had come off better is that al-Adil seems to have retained the ten additional *casals* that he had proffered just before the start of the conflict. From now on until the Fifth Crusade, the kingdom of Jerusalem stood essentially on the defensive against the Ayyubids. Ross has summarised the situation as follows: '[T]he [1210–11 Crusade] did not merely fail to improve the Christian position in the Levant. It actually had a negative impact on the prospects of the Latin settlers.' The Jerusalemites must have been bitterly disappointed by the outcome of all their efforts, over more than five years, to mobilise the support of the great powers of the West.²⁵ The new king, as those powers' protégé, could well have been widely blamed. In consequence, perhaps, John faced rather more opposition in the 'crisis of 1212–13' than he would otherwise have done, as we shall see.²⁶

Maybe John was doing what he could to distract from the failures of 1210–11 by swiftly participating in a new war, allied with the Templars against Cilician Armenia. This not only provided favoured barons with fresh opportunities for plunder and profit, it also heavily underlined the fact that the king was ready to go above and beyond the call of duty to assist the papacy.²⁷ This, then, was a good time to press the pope to proclaim a great new crusade – in part, no doubt, to obliterate the memory of the expedition that had just ended. Having helped John through the crisis of 1212–13,²⁸ Innocent quickly followed up by launching what we now label as the 'Fifth Crusade'.

Innocent did this by trumpeting the news that the Saracens had fortified Mount Tabor, the site of Christ's transfiguration.²⁹ It has often been suggested that the pope seized on this relatively unimportant event to generate a 'Holy Land scare' in the West.³⁰ Yet his sounding of the alarm should not be dismissed as mere inflammatory rhetoric. Mount

²⁵ As Ross notes, Innocent III was sufficiently anxious about the situation in the Levant in mid-1211 to call for support from virtually unprecedented quarters: from the king of faraway Christian Georgia, and even from Bohemund IV's sometime ally, the Ayyubid az-Zahir Ghazi of Aleppo (Ross, 'Relations between the Latin East and western Europe', 54–8).

²⁶ Below, 68–71.

²⁷ Innocent III had recently called on King John and others not to aid the Cilician Armenians against the Temple (see below, 78).

²⁸ Below, 74. ²⁹ *Quia maior*, in *PL*, CCXVI, cols. 817–22.

³⁰ See, for instance, Tyerman, *God's War*, 612.

Tabor overlooks the northern slopes of the Jezreel Valley, an area of high strategic significance. Potentially, the Ayyubids might use the fortified mountain to great advantage. Indeed, their very act of fortifying it was probably a first step towards recovering Nazareth, which they had lost as recently as 1204. Controlling the Tabor region would block the Westerners' easiest route inland, making it easier to keep them bottled up on the coast.³¹ Furthermore, Mount Tabor was an excellent base from which to raid the littoral – above all, Acre itself and its hinterland. Nor should we discount the significance of Mount Tabor in Christian religious tradition as a reason for seeking to destroy the fortification now set atop it. During the Fifth Crusade, as we shall see, John himself led an assault against the mountain.³² Bearing all this in mind, it would seem unlikely that he did so simply because the West now regarded the fortification of the mountain as the immediate *casus belli*.

For all Mount Tabor's strategic significance, it was becoming accepted, across Latin Christendom, that Egypt was the key to recovering Jerusalem. Under Innocent III's leadership, the Fourth Lateran Council, held in Rome in November 1215, formally agreed that the new crusade should target the Nile Delta.³³ A muster date was carefully fixed so that the crusaders would arrive in the East just as John's truce with the sultan expired.³⁴

The intervening years of truce were difficult ones, though John did manage to 'hold the fort' until the great new expedition arrived. The Hospitallers remained active against the Ayyubids in the north, and on at least one occasion John may have risked sending aid to the order.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, he was worried that the Ayyubids would break the truce before the Christians were ready.³⁶ Certainly, by early 1216 the pope seems to have heard that they had actually done so.³⁷

Port-city powerhouses

The royal demesne may be defined as specific territories within the kingdom that the king controlled directly. Such demesne land was particularly important to John. To some extent, at least, this was because so many

³¹ See esp. Kedar, 'The Fourth Crusade's second front', 101; and Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 134.

³² Below, 92.

³³ John himself later noted the Lateran Council's approval of the plan to attack Egypt (see below, 107, and also Appendix 2).

³⁴ *Ad Liberandam* (canon 71), in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N. P. Tanner, 2 vols. (London, 1990), I, 267.

³⁵ Below, 79. ³⁶ Below, 75. ³⁷ BC, I, doc. b-43.

other forms of the royal prerogative – what we may call ‘regalian rights’ enjoyed by previous kings of Jerusalem – had either been lost outright or else had come under serious challenge.³⁸ But the royal demesne, too, stood seriously diminished by the early thirteenth century. Perhaps the main reason for this is that, like most other great landowners in the realm, the monarchy had suffered massive losses in territory when Saladin had conquered almost the whole of the old kingdom in 1187.

Although it is now impossible to map John’s royal demense in any detail, it is both clear and unsurprising that far and away its most important parts consisted of the royal quarters of Acre and Tyre. These were the principal port-cities of the rump kingdom. Acre, certainly the greater of the two, was effectively the capital throughout the thirteenth century. Both cities were ‘populous fulcrums of international trade’, providing their rulers with ‘source[s] of incalculable benefit’.³⁹ They had become even more crucial than previously, now that so many other forms of royal revenue had been curtailed. In other words, Acre and Tyre did much to compensate for the losses of 1187. From then on, especially, the rulers of the kingdom were particularly dependent on tapping into the commercial wealth of these cities to pay for their political and military needs, with the revenues from the countryside being clearly insufficient for kings and great lords. The rulers of the kingdom took their share of Acre and Tyre’s income, often through dues, tolls, and so forth. This meant that trade, and the wealth generated by it, were plainly of prime importance to them.⁴⁰ But there were difficulties in doing this. From the very first, royal authority had been formally limited within Acre and Tyre. We may steal an analogy here from the early thirteenth-century bishop of Acre, Jacques de Vitry: the city was ‘a beast with nine heads, each at odds with the others’.⁴¹

Comparatively recently, historians have come to focus on powers other than the crown in Acre and Tyre during the crusader period.⁴² The cumulative effect of such studies can make it seem that, already by the early thirteenth century, the Jerusalemite kings were relatively weak within their great port-cities. There is some evidence from John’s reign that can

³⁸ See esp. Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 26–7, 147.

³⁹ Adapted from Tyerman, *God’s War*, 717.

⁴⁰ Adapted from P. W. Edbury, ‘The crusader states’, in D. Abulafia, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. V, c.1198–c.1300 (Cambridge, 1999), 596.

⁴¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la cinquième croisade*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Turnhout, 1998), 48.

⁴² See esp. the superlative work of David Jacoby, in *Studies on the Crusader States and on Venetian Expansion* (Northampton, 1989) and *Commercial Exchange across the Mediterranean: Byzantium, the Crusader Levant, Egypt and Italy* (Aldershot, 2005).

appear to support this view. For instance, there was significant trouble between the Genoese and Pisans in Acre in about 1212, and again, much more seriously, a decade later. Although, in the end, order was restored on both occasions, this seems to have been due more to the Church than to the king.⁴³ An alternative line of argument stresses not merely the personal competence of the rulers of the kingdom between 1192 and 1225. More importantly, it underlines that these figures remained in a position to assert themselves, upholding their position of leadership. As Riley-Smith neatly sums up: '[M]any of [the kings of Jerusalem] seem to have been pushing monarchs of a fairly conventional type, trying to exploit their rights and increase their power in practical terms. And these aggressive policies did not end with the disastrous loss of most of the kingdom to Saladin.'⁴⁴

On balance, the evidence from John's reign supports this view. To take a particularly important and telling example: much like his 'pushy' predecessors, John sought to weaken the economic stranglehold that Italian mercantile communities had established over Acre and Tyre. We can learn most about this vis-à-vis the Venetian commune at Tyre. Their large quarter, better described as a third, dominated the entire city.⁴⁵ John's policies in Tyre were so resented by the Venetians that they were brought up again with bitterness, some twenty years later, by their *bailli* (as the regent or lieutenant was often called) at Acre, Marsilio Zorzi.⁴⁶ By the end of John's reign, certainly, royal jurisdiction and taxation had been officially reasserted over all the 'native' (that is, non-Western) inhabitants of Venetian Tyre. To increase the business that passed through his hands, essentially at the Venetians' expense, John exempted all such 'natives' from port dues within the royal quarter. Perhaps most damagingly of all for the Venetians, John seems to have refused them permission to dispense 'high justice', the most exalted level of penal authority.⁴⁷ All in all, he hit the commune rather hard.

Various other aspects of John's lordship in Acre and Tyre cumulatively suggest what the monarchy remained capable of in the early thirteenth century. We know, for instance, that John appointed a *mathesap* to do the

⁴³ See esp. *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 858, and also nos. 848–9; see also below, 120–1.

⁴⁴ Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 68.

⁴⁵ See esp. M. Mack, 'The Italian quarters of Frankish Tyre: mapping a medieval city', *Journal of Medieval History* 33 (2007), 147–65.

⁴⁶ See esp. D. Jacoby, 'The Venetian privileges in the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem: twelfth and thirteenth-century interpretations and implementation', in *Commercial Exchange across the Mediterranean*, 166–71.

⁴⁷ See *Der Bericht des Marsilio Zorzi: Codex Querini-Stampalia IV 3 (1064)*, ed. O. Berggötz (Frankfurt, 1991), 139–40; UK⁷, III, D. *642; and also Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 68–9, 75.

rounds in Tyre. This was basically a market inspector with a band of sergeants, one of whose primary functions was to root out fraudsters.⁴⁸ The king authorised a variety of donations to religious institutions in the two port-cities.⁴⁹ On one occasion John received some property, near the Sidon gate in Tyre, from the Church of the Blessed Mary of the Valley of Josaphat. He was also the recipient of thirty bezants per year ‘on account of the fish’ that he had licensed Abbot Adam to catch.⁵⁰ When the coming of the Fifth Crusade was imminent, John gave part of the barbican between Acre’s double wall to the Teutonic Knights. This was just one of many donations to the up-and-coming order that he was involved in at around this time, possibly to curry favour with the Germans, who were expected to spearhead the crusader host.⁵¹ Close ties between the Briennes and the Teutonic Knights were later sustained by John’s nephew, Count Walter IV.⁵² Royal presence and ceremonial, in the two port-cities, were likewise exploited to the crown’s benefit. Like his predecessors since 1191, John had as his main residence the royal castle at Acre. He visited Tyre at least twice, but surely spent more time there than that.⁵³ Royal building schemes, in the two cities, were another means to impress. There was much work to be done if the money was available, especially since the Levant as a whole was still in the aftermath of the terrible earthquake of 20 May 1202. It seems unlikely that John was responsible for the double wall around Acre and its suburb Montmusard, first noted, so far as we know, within a couple of years of his coronation.⁵⁴ But he may have done much to rebuild the citadel at Tyre in the early years of his reign.⁵⁵

In 1216 a confraternity of Italian ‘pilgrims’ was founded at Acre for the ‘aid and succour of the Holy Land’. Jean Richard has interpreted this as reflecting the ‘growing apart’ of the various constituent groupings within

⁴⁸ See *Der Bericht des Marsilio Zorzi*, 140. See also M. Nader, *Burgesses and Burgess Law in the Latin Kingdoms of Jerusalem and Cyprus (1099–1325)* (Aldershot, 2006), 142; and Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 86–7.

⁴⁹ To focus in on some examples from before the Fifth Crusade, see *UKJ*, III, DD. 626, 647, 635, 632–3. D. †629 is a forgery, as Mayer demonstrated in *Marseilles Levantehandel und ein akkonensisches Fälscheratelier des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1972).

⁵⁰ *UKJ*, III, D. 630.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III, DD. 632–3, 638, 639, 640; see also *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, nos. 933, 954.

⁵² See K. Polejowski, ‘Les comtes de Brienne et l’ordre teutonique (xiii^e–xiv^e siècle)’, *La vie en Champagne*, new series 32 (2002), 4–8, and his ‘The counts of Brienne and the military orders in the thirteenth century’, in P. W. Edbury, ed., *The Military Orders*, vol. V, *Politics and Power* (Farnham, 2012), 285–95.

⁵³ Ernoul–Bernard, 409; Colbert–Fontainebleau, 311, 319; see also J. Prawer, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: European Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (London, 1972), 112.

⁵⁴ See esp. Kedar, ‘The Fourth Crusade’s second front’, 91–4. ⁵⁵ *UKJ*, III, D. 630.

the kingdom of Jerusalem.⁵⁶ Yet, even as the confraternity bonded together in Italianness, the pilgrims wrote of the loyalty due to certain overarching institutions in the kingdom – amongst them, of course, the monarchy.⁵⁷ For these Italians, as for so many others, the ‘Holy Land of Jerusalem’ remained a unit, with the crown as a central element at its heart.

How much money did Acre and Tyre bring into the royal coffers? Precise sums, unfortunately, are nowhere to be found. In the mid-thirteenth century the English chronicler Matthew Paris tendered an extremely high figure for the revenue of Acre alone. This is surely exaggerated,⁵⁸ but it does help confirm the widespread impression that the monarchy usually derived a very large amount from Acre and Tyre together, in the decades immediately preceding this statement by Matthew Paris. Yet there are many signs that the kingdom as a whole was not doing well in John’s day. Riley-Smith has suggested that Acre and Tyre were hit by a ‘major financial crisis’ that reached its peak in around 1220.⁵⁹ Serious problems can be discerned as early as the mid-1210s, though. There were several poor harvests in the run-up to the Fifth Crusade, and these could well have had a knock-on effect on the rest of the kingdom’s economy.⁶⁰ Colbert-Fontainebleau vehemently insists that the ‘land of Jerusalem’ was never in a healthy state at any time during John’s reign. Already ‘impoverished’ at the time of John’s arrival, the kingdom then had to bear economic downturn, the strains of the Fifth Crusade and perhaps the consequent financial crisis as well. Small wonder, then, that Colbert-Fontainebleau describes the kingdom as ‘[still in] poverty’ when John left it for the final time in 1222.⁶¹

Perhaps what Colbert-Fontainebleau is really talking about here, though, is the financial position of the monarchy, rather than that of the kingdom at large. What is abundantly clear is that the rulers’ income was never anywhere near adequate in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, even when Acre and Tyre were booming. Various anecdotes and *acta* have survived that graphically illustrate the relative poverty of

⁵⁶ J. Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, tr. J. Shirley, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1979), vol. A, 285.

⁵⁷ See Alexander IV, *Registres*, ed. C. Bourel de la Roncière *et al.*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1895–1959), I, no. 346.

⁵⁸ Paris claimed that he had heard this from the famous crusader Richard of Cornwall, who in turn had heard it from the Templars and Hospitallers. See Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 64.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁰ *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 902. See also the *Annales Ceccanenses* in *MGH, SS*, vol. 19, 302.

⁶¹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 307, 355.

Henry of Champagne, the regent (John of Ibelin) and our John too.⁶² At the start of King John's reign the weakness of the royal treasury was perhaps offset by the sizeable war chest provided by Innocent III and Philip Augustus. It is believable that this got John through the 1210–11 Crusade and the subsequent campaign against Cilician Armenia. Then came some years of peace, with the looming prospect of the Fifth Crusade. During these years John probably did what he could to stockpile money and *matériel*. He appears to have received a substantial dowry when he remarried, which, it seems, took place in 1214.⁶³ Yet, even just after this, he continued to complain loudly of his poverty to those who would listen in the West.⁶⁴ One of the last things that Innocent III did for John was to send out a further 9,000 *l.* 'of aid for the Holy Land'. Once again, though, it would seem that the money could be disbursed only with the assent of the Templars and Hospitallers.⁶⁵ Despite all such efforts, the Fifth Crusade years realised some of John's worst fears. By 1219 he may well have been living from hand to mouth, saved only by acquiring the Egyptian port-city of Damietta in November. Certainly, by 1221 the financial situation was extremely difficult for both king and kingdom. The resulting tensions could well have shaped the renewed Pisan–Genoese conflict that erupted just before John's final departure from his realm in 1222.⁶⁶

The king and his barons

The issues surrounding the 'constitutionality', or otherwise, of John's rule are part of a wider Jerusalemite interest in law more generally. Much like so many others back in the Latin West, the Jerusalemites had long been greatly concerned with legal matters. Particular examples of pre-1187 Jerusalemite legislation, such as the *Assise sur la ligece*, promulgated by King Amalric (r. 1163–74), have provoked a storm of discussion amongst interested scholars.⁶⁷ One key question is whether the *Assise* should be

⁶² See esp. *ibid.*, 223, and a rather overdone summary by Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, A, 245.

⁶³ Below, 79–80. ⁶⁴ See, for instance, *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 873.

⁶⁵ *Regesta pontificorum Romanorum inde ab anno post Christo nato 1198 ad annum 1304*, compiled A. Potthast, 2 vols. (repr. Graz, 1957), I, nos. 5180, 5209.

⁶⁶ Below, 120–1.

⁶⁷ For the *Assise*, the place to start is Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 145–84. But see also G. A. Loud, 'The *Assise sur la ligece* and Ralph of Tiberias', in P. W. Edbury, ed., *Crusade and Settlement: Papers Read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East* (Cardiff, 1985), 204–12; and S. Reynolds, 'Fiefs and vassals in twelfth-century Jerusalem: a view from the West', *Crusades* 1 (2002), esp. 37–40.

seen as part of the emergence of a cohesive ‘baronial movement’, concerned, above all, with the rights and privileges of that class.⁶⁸ Alternatively, is this baronial movement more a historians’ construct than a medieval reality? What can be said with confidence is that the precise position of the Jerusalemite monarchy vis-à-vis its barons had plainly become much more of a live issue by the late twelfth century. For example, we could cite the notorious dispute between John’s predecessor, King Aimery, and Ralph of Tiberias, which followed an attempt to assassinate Aimery in 1198.⁶⁹ Before Aimery’s death, in 1205, these kinds of concerns had already given rise to a formal monarchical riposte in written form. The *Livre au roi* was very much a product of its time. Supposedly written to codify and proclaim the law on such issues of contemporary significance, it was also, as Greilsammer has demonstrated, something of a royalist manifesto.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it was to be through law that the Ibelins and their supporters sought to justify their essentially successful assault, after 1228, against the absentee Hohenstaufen monarchy of Jerusalem.⁷¹ This helped ensure that, by the mid-thirteenth century, the *Assise* – quite contrary to its original usage – had become a sort of Magna Carta to be deployed against arbitrary kings and regents, and a ‘school’ of baronial jurists eventually produced a series of remarkable treatises on court procedure and legal custom.⁷² Given this ‘baronial’ triumph, which crystallised in the decade or so following John’s reign, the obvious question is this: what was the crown–baronage relationship, and how powerful was the Jerusalemite crown vis-à-vis its barons, just before the Ibelin-led assault? This can bring us back to the years of John’s rule, 1210 to 1225.

There were various significant disputes between the kingdom’s ruler and some of the barons in the years between 1192 and 1225. Historians have tended to suggest that, cumulatively, these disputes are signs of a gradual decay of royal authority during this period.⁷³ One anecdote, in

⁶⁸ Above all, see Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, for instance xi.

⁶⁹ For this, see esp. Loud, ‘The *Assise sur la ligece* and Ralph of Tiberias’.

⁷⁰ See *Le livre au roi*, ed. M. Greilsammer (Paris, 1995), esp. 87–111; see also Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 155, and P. W. Edbury, ‘Fiefs and vassals in the kingdom of Jerusalem: from the twelfth century to the thirteenth’, *Crusades* 1 (2002), 56–8.

⁷¹ For this, see esp. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 40–57.

⁷² Paraphrasing H. E. Mayer, ‘The Latin East, 1098–1205’, in D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith, eds., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. IV, c.1024–c.1198 (Cambridge, 2004), part 2, 672.

⁷³ See esp. Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, A, 248–50.

particular, has been seized upon to show the alleged depths to which the monarchy had already sunk in John's reign.

When King John was holding court. . . a cousin of his insulted the people of the land [that is, the Jerusalemites]. Bernard of Beirut retorted, and [this man] then called him a liar. Bernard then killed him in front of the king in the court. And then [Bernard] departed and went away to Tripoli, and no one stopped him nor dared lay a hand on him.⁷⁴

Although this anecdote has sometimes been taken at face value, there are reasons to doubt its essential truth. For instance, although we know a fair amount about various 'Brienne kinsmen' who spent time in the kingdom during John's reign, not one of them is known to have been killed in this way. On the other hand, it is believable that tensions arose between newcomers who had recently arrived in the Holy Land and the established Jerusalemite baronage. Furthermore, the murders of various other figures, including the patriarch Albert of Vercelli in 1214, indicate a wider 'culture' of assassination and criminal violence in the Latin East at this time.⁷⁵ If the substance of the 'Bernard' anecdote is true, then the monarchy does appear to have lost ground significantly, faced with the 'growing indiscipline of the great lords'.⁷⁶ But the king's ability to punish baronial misdeeds was only one part – if, admittedly, a highly important one – in the maintenance of royal power. In the end, the real question about any royal–baronial relationship is whether the king had sufficient authority to lead them as a group. That is a question we *can* answer – above all, by looking at the composition of John's loose governmental 'inner circle'.

John could shape and shuffle this circle largely to suit himself. Of course, it did not consist only of barons. It included some leading clerics, and perhaps also the heads of the principal military orders, or their representatives. Conceivably, John was especially dependent on the inner circle during the earliest years of his reign, when he was a novice king in an alien environment. At that stage, John's right-hand-man, who may well have rather overshadowed the king himself, was Walter of Montbéliard. Turning to the ecclesiastical sphere, Hamilton has suggested that the patriarch and papal legate, Albert of Vercelli, enjoyed a somewhat similar ascendancy over the new king.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Lignages d'Outremer*, ed. M.-A. Nielen (Paris, 2003), 73–4. ⁷⁵ Below, 73.

⁷⁶ Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, A, 250. If the 'Bernard' anecdote is not true, it remains interesting in any case, as an indicator of how John and his court were later perceived.

⁷⁷ B. Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States: The Secular Church* (London, 1980), 252.

During these early years the following seem to have emerged as the baronial mainstays of John's inner circle: Walter of Montbéliard, James of Durnay, Ralph of Tiberias, Roard of Haifa, Aimar of Layron, Garnier 'the German', Aimar of Ais, Geoffrey of Cafran, John Le Tor and Thomas of Maugastel, perhaps with a couple of others.⁷⁸ Most of these barons had also been close to the centre of power during the regency immediately preceding John's reign.⁷⁹ Thus, a message of 'business as usual' seems pretty clear.

Naturally, this list changed as the years went by. The greatest single loss seems to have come very early, in about 1212, with the death of Walter of Montbéliard. This was the start of a run of mortality that would profoundly alter John's kingship.⁸⁰ In the long run, though, the likes of Walter were replaced in John's counsels by various newer, younger figures. Two of these would be particularly important for the future: Walter's nephew (and therefore another of John's close kinsmen), Odo of Montbéliard, and Balian of Sidon, who married John's niece, Margaret, during the Fifth Crusade.⁸¹

What the king could offer his barons, above all, was patronage. Paradoxically, the enormous losses of 1187 may actually have made royal service all the more attractive, simply by cutting down other forms of preferment even more sharply. 'Crown offices', as they have come to be called, were obvious plums of patronage: the best way for the king to reward those whom he wanted to keep close to him at the heart of government. Here, too, we can see John largely sticking to his 'business as usual' policy. He seems to have confirmed the constable (Walter of Montbéliard) and the seneschal (Ralph of Tiberias) in their offices, and they retained them until they died.⁸² Indeed, under John, the constablenesship became rather a

⁷⁸ This list is chiefly derived from the following *acta*: *UKJ*, III, DD. 626, *627, 630, 632–3, 635, 638, 639, 640, 641, 647; and see also *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, nos. 933, 954. It is worth repeating that *UKJ*, III, D. †629 is a forgery. But see, too, Ernoul–Bernard, 408–47, and esp. Colbert–Fontainebleau, 305–55.

⁷⁹ *UKJ*, III, DD. 772, 775; *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, nos. 818–19, 821, 828–9; Colbert–Fontainebleau, 306, 311–12.

⁸⁰ Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 45; Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 20.

⁸¹ See Colbert–Fontainebleau, 332; and Genealogy 1, above. See below, 67, 77, 133–7, for more on Odo.

⁸² *UKJ*, III, DD. 626, 635, 632–3, 638–9, 647; *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, nos. 811, 821, 933. There is an isolated story in Colbert–Fontainebleau, 316, which says that Walter had surrendered the constablenesship to John, in exchange for 5,000 bezants, by autumn 1210 (that is, by around the time that John actually became king). But we know that Walter was constable in 1211 (see esp. *UKJ*, III, D. 626). The likeliest explanation is that Colbert–Fontainebleau is simply in error here, and that Walter retained the constablenesship through to his death in about 1212. For further discussion of the subject, and an alternative view, see Mayer in *UKJ*, III, D. *631.

Montbéliard family perquisite, since he later passed it on to Walter's nephew, Odo.⁸³ Yet, back in the early days of his reign, John *did* manage to project into crown office at least one close kinsman who had come out with him from the West. Aimar of Layron was quickly replaced, as marshal, by James of Durnay.⁸⁴

We can begin to discern other forms of royal patronage too, especially in Acre and Tyre. In 1212, for instance, John Le Tor was viscount (it seems, of Acre) and Thomas of Maugastel was castellan of Tyre. Presumably, they were both appointed or confirmed in office by King John.⁸⁵ Naturally, too, it was the king who appointed the commanders of his armies. John doubtless authorised Walter of Montbéliard's raid on the Nile Delta in 1211. Later that year John sent fifty knights north to aid the Templars in their struggle against Cilician Armenia. This small force was led by Aimar of Ais and Geoffrey of Cafran.⁸⁶ During the king's absences from Acre or from the kingdom as a whole, he left behind one or more regents or lieutenants. When John went to Tyre for his coronation, as we have seen, Philip of Ibelin and Garnier the German remained to garrison Acre. This proved to be a wise precaution.⁸⁷ Unlike Philip, Garnier proved loyal to John in the long run; and so it was he who was left at Acre, 'in the king's place', whilst John was away in Egypt on the Fifth Crusade, from 1218 to 1220.⁸⁸ Finally, John appointed Odo of Montbéliard as *bailli* when he quit the kingdom for what proved to be the final time, in 1222.⁸⁹

In truth, though, John's 'business as usual' pose was neither very successful nor very convincing. Dramatic change came in a rush at the start of his reign, above all in the form of a series of major disputes with leading Jerusalemite barons. The earliest of these was probably the one involving Walter of Caesarea. Walter had been close to the heart of Jerusalemite governance for around twenty years, but from 1210 – from the start of John's reign – he was plainly focused on Cyprus. This might have been simply because he had become constable there, and so needed to be based on the island. But there are reasons to believe that he had fallen out with John too. Although getting on in life, Walter was still waiting to inherit Caesarea from his mother and her second husband, Aimar of Layron, and

⁸³ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 333, suggests that Odo was already constable in 1218. *UKY*, III, D. 639, shows that he certainly was by 1220.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, DD. 626, 635, 647, 632–3, and see D. 630; see also Colbert-Fontainebleau, 330.

⁸⁵ *UKY*, III, D. 630. ⁸⁶ See Colbert-Fontainebleau, 317; and below, 78–9.

⁸⁷ See Colbert-Fontainebleau, 312; and above, 55–6.

⁸⁸ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 334. ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 355.

Aimar could well have overloaded the overlordship with debt.⁹⁰ Aimar, of course, had been the secular head of the Jerusalemite legation sent out to the West to conduct final negotiations with John in about 1208. It is quite believable that he and John had then forged an accord, even before John had come out to the East. (This accord seems to have been strong enough to survive Aimar's replacement, as marshal of the kingdom, by John's kinsman, James of Durnay – conceivably a sign that Aimar himself acquiesced in this.) Walter could well have been alienated by John's early rapprochement with his old enemy, Aimar. So, perhaps, Walter decided to remove himself, from the very first, from the new king's orbit.

However, it was another 'baronial' dispute that really made the start of John's reign such a watershed. This quarrel set the king against the former regent, John of Ibelin – the man who had ruled the kingdom for five years before our John arrived to take over. What happened between King John and the Ibelin brothers, John and Philip, can be summarised fairly briefly. The regent and his brother had, naturally, been central during the regency period itself, and they remained so, briefly, into the new reign. Whilst John of Ibelin was concluding his regency by attending the new king's coronation at Tyre, Philip, one of the barons entrusted with the task of guarding the city in the absence of most of its leaders, was at Acre. Philip witnessed an *actum* for King John during the next year, 1211.⁹¹ By then, though, the new king's relationship with John of Ibelin may already have soured. The former regent could well have hoped to retain the effective leadership of the kingdom, as right-hand-man for the newcomer king. But this position was filled by Walter of Montbéliard, the ex-regent of Cyprus, who had the crucial advantage of being the king's close kinsman.⁹²

Other leading Jerusalemites may well have come to share in growing Ibelin disaffection with the new regime, especially when the king's long-awaited first war, the 1210–11 Crusade, badly disappointed expectations. Relatively soon afterwards a rare opportunity presented itself to be rid of King John. In late 1212 his queen, Maria, died shortly after childbirth, leaving only their newborn daughter, Isabella II (often called 'Yolande' or 'Yolanda').⁹³ Maria's death destroyed John's hopes of founding a line of

⁹⁰ See esp. the brief summary by Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 26, and in his *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 48 n. 36. See also S. Tibble, *Monarchy and Lordships in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1099–1291* (Oxford, 1989), 120–7.

⁹¹ See Colbert-Fontainebleau, 311–12; and *UKJ*, III, DD. 626, 647; see also the summary by Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 47.

⁹² For this, see esp. below, 77.

⁹³ Innocent III had certainly heard of Maria's death by 9 January 1213 (*PL*, CCXVI, col. 738). I have chosen to call John and Maria's daughter 'Isabella' to stress her place in the Jerusalemite royal line, as successor to her grandmother, Queen Isabella I.

kings of Jerusalem through her, and so effectively cut short the Briennes' long-term dynastic stake in his new kingdom. But the queen's demise raised a crucial 'constitutional' problem as well. Would her death also end John's reign as king? Like other king(-consorts) of Jerusalem both before and after him, John seems to have believed that anointing and coronation had conferred on him the inalienable right to rule as king for life.⁹⁴ Yet the fate of Guy of Lusignan, twenty years earlier, provided a highly disturbing precedent to the contrary. Following a catastrophic reign and the death of his wife, Queen Sibylla, Guy had been effectively deposed. Balian of Ibelin and *his* wife, the former queen Maria Comnena, had been instrumental in bringing this about. As Edbury puts it: '[M]aybe it is not too fanciful to suppose that it was their sons [i.e. John and Philip of Ibelin] who were taking the lead in arguing along the same lines in 1212–13.'⁹⁵

However, there is at least one crucial difference between the events of the early 1190s and those of 1212–13. Unlike Guy, who had sired no surviving children of the royal line, John and Maria had had a baby girl, the 'right heir' to the kingdom. She would need a regent figure for the next decade and more. As her father, John surely seemed the natural candidate, at least for this role. Moreover, the *Livre au roi* had stated that, if the king or queen was a minor, then the regency belonged, in the first instance, to the child's surviving parent.⁹⁶ But it is worth noting that this view had not prevailed on the most recent occasions when it might have done (that is, in 1174–6 and again in 1185–6).⁹⁷ So, why did John succeed in retaining the rule of the kingdom – at least, during his daughter's long minority?

This question becomes all the more pertinent when we bear in mind that John not only retained the rule of the kingdom but contrived to keep the crown itself. In this way, he set a precedent that would be followed, in rather different circumstances, by his successor as king of Jerusalem, the Emperor Frederick II.⁹⁸ What is beyond doubt is that John took advantage of the fact that the situation in 1212–13 was unprecedented in Jerusalemite history. Never before had there been a minor as the 'right heir' with his or her father, crowned king, still living. The simplest solution to the problem, if enough people would accept it, was simply to let the father go on ruling as king. But until when? This meant that the crucial political question now changed to something quite different.

⁹⁴ See Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 167.

⁹⁵ Much of the above paraphrases Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 33; see also his *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 48.

⁹⁶ *Le livre au roi*, ch. 6.

⁹⁷ For these, see esp. Hamilton, *The Leper King and His Heirs*, 84–105, 207–16.

⁹⁸ Below, 145.

Would John's kingship lapse when Isabella came of age for marriage?⁹⁹ There may even have been scope for major differences of opinion concerning precisely what had happened in 1212–13. Some could regard John as still king for life, whilst others could see him as merely a crowned regent. For their part, the Ibelins were bitterly opposed to John staying on as ruler in *any* capacity. Furthermore, we may guess that they had the support of their brother-in-law, Walter of Caesarea, who had his own reasons for antagonism towards John.¹⁰⁰

The outcome was a kind of stalemate. It is possible that King John formally revoked the lordship of Beirut from John of Ibelin's hands – which may have provided the justification for the king's successor, Frederick II, to try to do the same, fifteen years or so later.¹⁰¹ But, if King John did indeed attempt this, he proved unable to enforce it – and John of Ibelin pushed ahead with his plans to build up Beirut into a semi-independent political and commercial hub, to rival even Acre and Tyre. Moreover, geographically speaking, at least, he was very well placed to attempt this.¹⁰² The truth is that, in general, King John's opponents' estates and possessions in the kingdom of Jerusalem seem to have been safe from royal retribution – with, admittedly, the possible exception of the 'Caesarea' incident during the Fifth Crusade.¹⁰³ Maybe what kept them so was, indeed, a high aristocratic *esprit de corps*, underpinned by legalism: the essence of the so-called 'baronial movement'. Unlike his successor, Frederick, John may well have considered it too risky to make a determined attempt to punish his domestic enemies severely, and here there is a link to the 'Bernard' anecdote with which we started. But, equally, John's opponents clearly felt obliged to stay out of the highest level of Jerusalemite politics for the foreseeable future, following in the footsteps of earlier barons who had quarrelled with their king. The Ibelins essentially withdrew from the Jerusalemite crown orbit for as long as John remained on the throne, whereas the break between the king and Walter of Caesarea seems to have been noticeably less final.¹⁰⁴ For now, in 1212–13, the checkmated Ibelin brothers joined Walter on Cyprus, which was confirmed as the headquarters of hostility towards John under its new

⁹⁹ It is worth adding that the *Livre au roi*, for its part, certainly 'envisage[s] [a] situation in which [the] parent-regent might continue to exercise control after the heir to the throne's majority' (Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 73).

¹⁰⁰ For this relationship, see Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 48 n. 36.

¹⁰¹ For Frederick's attempt to revoke the grant of Beirut, in a dramatic scene in 1228, see esp. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 41–2.

¹⁰² See *ibid.*, 29; Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 76–8; and Map 1, above.

¹⁰³ Below, 93. ¹⁰⁴ Below, 80, 93, 135.

ruler, King Hugh I.¹⁰⁵ Henceforth, to the end of John's reign, the Ibelins were to be amongst Hugh's leading counsellors, rather than John's, and Philip of Ibelin became regent of Cyprus on Hugh's death in 1218.¹⁰⁶ In short, the Ibelins were effectively 'elbowed out' in the kingdom of Jerusalem for more than a decade, something that later pro-Ibelin sources consciously gloss over.¹⁰⁷ It is true that the Ibelins were able to leap back into the saddle in the kingdom of Jerusalem after John's reign there had ended.¹⁰⁸ But, overall, the Ibelin party's chequered fortunes are a sign of the strength, rather than the weakness, of John's kingship. King John and his regime had, in effect, come to define themselves by keeping the Ibelins out. For a further indicator of just how much damage John had done to the Ibelins, we could well add the following. Next time the Ibelins had a regency and effective control of a kingdom, on Cyprus, they fought tooth and nail to keep it.¹⁰⁹

The vast majority of the Jerusalemite barons stuck with John's headship as king all the way through to the crisis that eventually ended his reign.¹¹⁰ King John was even able to rule 'by remote control', from the West, between 1222 and 1225.¹¹¹ This does not support the notion that the crown's position to lead its baronage was already critically impaired. The admittedly major clique of hostile barons was very much the exception, rather than the rule. The term 'baronial movement' is hardly a good label for this, since so few barons were in opposition. In addition, unsurprisingly, we can detect personal and corporate self-interest on all sides, as well as the legality that the Ibelins, especially, liked to proclaim was theirs alone.

The Church in the kingdom

After 1187, and especially after the election of Innocent III in 1198, the papacy swiftly became far more interested and involved – even, at times, approaching the point of dominance – in the Holy Land. Increasingly, the popes had come to regard the ruler of the kingdom of Jerusalem as just one of several chief leaders out there – and most of the rest were clerical (that is, strictly subordinate to the papacy). Nor were the popes alone in viewing the Latin East as more and more subordinate to the West in general. It may well be that, for the papacy, the choice of John as king-elect

¹⁰⁵ Below, 76–8 ¹⁰⁶ See esp. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 47–9.

¹⁰⁷ See esp. below, 133–5.

¹⁰⁸ See Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 39–57.

¹⁰⁹ See esp. *ibid.*, 38. ¹¹⁰ This will be considered separately – see below, 135–8.

¹¹¹ Below, 133–5.

represented a new start, after a range of tensions with Jerusalemite rulers in the 1190s through to 1207–8.¹¹² Successive popes recognised and approved John as king throughout his effective reign – and, indeed, well beyond it.¹¹³ This did much to ensure that John's relations with the leading clergy in his kingdom were also generally good. But it is important to stress that the papacy was backing him as its own, and others', protégé – that is, of itself, and of great Western lords such as the king of France and Blanche of Champagne. John was not as effectively independent of the institutional Church as his better-established royal predecessors had been. The clergy in the kingdom could well have seen their new king as really rather 'sidelineable', certainly by comparison with the pope and his representatives in the Latin East. So the bedrock of the Church's support, although critical for John, was by no means pure, unalloyed benefit to him.

At the start of his reign the newcomer king was perhaps rather overshadowed by the leading clerics in his kingdom – much as, in the secular sphere, he may also have been by Walter of Montbéliard. During those first few years John could well have been particularly dependent on the following amongst the kingdom's episcopate: the patriarch and papal legate, Albert of Vercelli; and the Champenois figures Archbishop Clarendon of Tyre, and the royal chancellor and new bishop of Sidon, Ralph of Merencourt.

Albert, in particular, was a hugely charismatic individual. He was part of Innocent III's circle of advisors and spiritual friends, which included the likes of Peter of Ivrea, patriarch of Antioch (d. 1217). It was through the direct appointment of Albert and Peter to their patriarchates in the East that the pope signalled his determination to get a grip on the Church in the Holy Land.¹¹⁴ Naturally, it was Albert who married John to the 'right heiress', Maria. Shortly afterwards he crowned them both in the cathedral at Tyre, the most important Jerusalemite ecclesiastical building still in Christian hands.¹¹⁵ Albert proved very active, as the pope wished, in Latin Eastern politics, above all as a peacemaker. But success eluded him in his greatest efforts at reconciliation, between King Hugh of Cyprus and Walter of Montbéliard, and between the various contending parties in the 'War of the Antiochene Succession'.¹¹⁶ All in all, it is possible to

¹¹² For this, see esp. R. Potts, "*Rex, rex electus et dominus Hierosolymitanus*": royal succession in the kingdom of Jerusalem between 1187 and 1205' (unpub. MPhil thesis, University of Leeds, 2010); and above, 47.

¹¹³ See esp. below, 138–9.

¹¹⁴ B. Bolton, "Serpent in the dust: sparrow on the housetop": attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the circle of Pope Innocent III', in R. N. Swanson, ed., *The Holy Land, Holy Lands, and Christian History* (Woodbridge, 2000), 154–80.

¹¹⁵ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 311. ¹¹⁶ For these, see below, 76–80.

conclude that 'Albert. . . was a more important person at Acre than the new king, in the early years of the reign'.¹¹⁷ Yet John's period of 'royal tutelage' does seem to have come to an end after two to four years, in 1212–14. To start with, Walter of Montbéliard died. Then came the crisis of 1212–13, during which John contrived to retain his crown (though arguably 'for' his infant daughter). Finally, in 1214, Albert was assassinated by a disgruntled cleric with a private grudge against the patriarch. It is unfortunate that we know so little about this event, which contemporaries found truly shocking.¹¹⁸ John was surely 'acclimatised' as king by this point, though, and henceforth he seems to emerge much more as the lead political figure in his own reign.

We have already looked at the critical role played by various Champenois-born clerics in pushing for John's accession. It would not be surprising if, as king, John drew close to them. The highest-ranking figure in this group was, of course, Archbishop Clarendon of Tyre. But we know much more about the close connections linking John and the new bishop of Sidon, Ralph of Merencourt. At the start of his reign, John confirmed Ralph as chancellor of the kingdom.¹¹⁹ Ralph soon proved his worth in the crisis of 1212–13, undertaking a dangerous winter voyage to Italy to procure explicit papal support for the king as soon as was feasible.¹²⁰ Following the murder of Albert of Vercelli, it was Ralph who emerged as the new patriarch-elect. Despite Innocent III's determination to free the Church in the Holy Land from lay control, John's backing for Ralph could well have been decisive. The pope acquiesced in the election, and presumably it was he personally who consecrated Ralph at the Fourth Lateran Council.¹²¹ Ralph may well have been the only patriarch of Jerusalem elected in the thirteenth century who was not a papal nominee.¹²² At around the same time as his elevation, though, Ralph seems to have resigned the office of chancellor, probably taking the view that it would be inappropriate to retain it concurrently with the supreme dignity of the patriarchate. From then on, John kept the chancellorship vacant. Mayer has put forward various possible reasons for this. His most intriguing suggestion is that John was quite used to the idea that kings and great

¹¹⁷ Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States*, 252. For Albert's career more generally, see V. Mosca, *Alberto, patriarca di Gerusalemme: tempo, vita, opera* (Rome, 1996).

¹¹⁸ Briefly summarised in *ibid.*, 384–5.

¹¹⁹ The rest of this paragraph is derived chiefly from Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 300–17.

¹²⁰ See below, 74, for more on this.

¹²¹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 319. Innocent further commanded John to protect Ralph and other leading Latin Eastern prelates from Muslim corsairs by sending ships, perhaps to escort these clergy back from the Fourth Lateran Council (BC, I, doc. b-43).

¹²² For this, see Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States*, 248–81.

lords might not have a chancellor. Neither Champagne nor the kingdom of France had had one in the run-up to John's departure for the East in 1210.¹²³

Ralph may not have been the only Jerusalemite cleric promoted – to some extent, at least – through the exercise of uncanonical royal pressure. Clarembald's successor as archbishop of Tyre was Simon of Maugastel. Perhaps this was largely because Simon's uncle, Joscius (d. 1202), had previously been bishop of Acre, archbishop of Tyre and sometime chancellor of the kingdom.¹²⁴ But maybe we can also detect a royal hand in Simon's election, since John was, it seems, already quite close to the Maugastel family.¹²⁵ From now on, Simon and John's careers were to be particularly closely intertwined, one ending his life as patriarch of Constantinople, the other as its emperor.¹²⁶ But the papacy remained in a position to exert itself. When the see of Acre fell vacant, it seems to have been Innocent III who secured the appointment of the celebrated crusade preacher, Jacques de Vitry.¹²⁷

The Church may well have been key to John's success in surmounting the crisis of 1212–13. John and his closest allies certainly knew how important the Church would be. As we have seen, Ralph of Merencourt raced back to Italy to obtain explicit papal support for the king as soon as possible. Prompted by Ralph, Innocent wrote directly to John, offering his condolences on the death of Queen Maria. More usefully, the pope promised continued, active support in both East and West for the king and his newborn daughter. Innocent urged John to keep faith in the Lord, and remain focused on the defence of the Holy Land. The pope also wrote to a variety of other Latin Eastern figures intimately connected with John: to the patriarch and legate, Albert, and the episcopate of the kingdom of Jerusalem; to the Templars and Hospitallers; and to Bohemund IV of Antioch and Tripoli. Innocent instructed them all to give strong and faithful support to John and his daughter, 'defending his land and laws as you would your own'. In his letter to Albert and the episcopate, the pope also emphasised that ecclesiastical sanctions could be used, if necessary, to enforce obedience.¹²⁸ Innocent's prompt action may have been decisive in scotching any larger-scale unrest within the kingdom of Jerusalem itself.

However, Mayer has suggested that John's difficulties in 1212–13 percolated downwards, affecting even his relationships with various

¹²³ Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 318–19.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 342–9. ¹²⁵ *UKY*, III, D. 630. ¹²⁶ See esp. below, 150–1.

¹²⁷ Summarised by Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States*, 253.

¹²⁸ *PL*, CCXVI, cols. 737–9.

lower-ranking clerical figures working in the royal chancellery. It may be that *the* chief notary there, the Champenois-born Baldwin, took the 'Ibelin' side in the crisis, and perhaps was sacked as a result. By 1217 Baldwin was a canon on Cyprus, that hotbed of opposition to John.¹²⁹ Remarkably, we do know a little about some other clerkly figures who seem to have remained loyal to the king. The Briennois John of Vendevre had followed his lord, Count John, out to the kingdom of Jerusalem by 1217. John of Vendevre possibly replaced Baldwin as the chief notary in the chancellery, and then accompanied the king to Egypt on the Fifth Crusade.¹³⁰ King John may also have had an Italian physician, Master Constantine. Constantine served John 'in partibus transmarinis' for some time, before retiring to become a canon at Chartres Cathedral. This prebend was provided, apparently, by Innocent's successor, Pope Honorius III.¹³¹

The kings of Jerusalem had long been patrons of religious orders, and, as we have seen, the Briennes had had a 'special relationship' with the Premonstratensians for more than fifty years. The English-born Abbot Gervase of Prémontré perhaps hoped to benefit a great deal, now that John was king in the Holy Land. Gervase and his circle wrote to him on at least three occasions, though we have only one 'reply' from John.¹³² These precious surviving transcripts confirm that, as king, John maintained a relatively wide correspondence with the West. (If John wrote to Gervase, then he clearly wrote to many others there who were much more important to him than the abbot.) However, this missive to Gervase is the only letter of John's we have for the period 1210–17. For this reason, it is well worth translating in full, above all to try to catch the tone of the kingship that John aimed to project when engaged in dialogue with the West.

John, by the grace of God king of Jerusalem and count of Brienne, to Gervase, abbot of Prémontré, and all the convent, greetings in Him who is salvation.¹³³

We reveal the true state of the Holy Land to your discretion. Know, then, that day by day things get worse, whilst we labour in a state of poverty and scarcity of defenders. Indeed, we still have a truce, but on the Saracen side [it is] defective. Truly, we are not their equal in terms of men, and they know our weakness, [and so] we presume and fear that they will break the truce, which we hope [for] aid to prevent. Wherefore we entreat your human kindness in the Lord, that you may remember the Land of the Crucified, us, and our daughter in your prayers.

Furthermore, know that we are well and in good spirits, along with our daughter, just as we would wish to hear the same about you.

¹²⁹ Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, II, 697–704.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 738–43. ¹³¹ *Obituaires de la province de Sens*, II, 84–5.

¹³² *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, nos. 847, 854, 873, 884.

¹³³ Note a similar salutation in John's 'new' letter to Frederick II: see below, 107; and Appendix 2.

For the rest, we inform you that, with the counsel of our prelates and barons, we have married the daughter of the illustrious king of Armenia, and through this marriage, we have acquired much aid.¹³⁴

The Premonstratensians' natural successor was, arguably, the Franciscan Order, founded just before John became king. The Brienne name may well have meant something to Francis himself, even before the founding of the order. In late 1204 or early 1205 Francis had begun a journey to southern Italy. Apparently, his aim was to join the forces fighting there under the overall command of John's brother, Count Walter III of Brienne. Shortly before leaving Assisi, Francis experienced the first in a series of visions that transformed his life.¹³⁵ In about 1212 he sought to travel to the east, to preach and convert the infidel.¹³⁶ One of his closest disciples, Brother Giles, reached the kingdom of Jerusalem in 1215. The Franciscan 'province', or ecclesiastical region, of the Holy Land was formally constituted in 1217, and placed under the control of the future minister-general of the order, Elias of Cortona. Elias worked in the province for about three years.¹³⁷ It therefore seems that it was in the later 1210s that the Franciscans first established habitations for themselves in the kingdom of Jerusalem. King John may well have approved this development. The foundations were thus laid for the future close rapport between the Briennes and the Franciscan Order.

Across the Latin East

The Ayyubids' relative quiescence between 1211 and 1217 gave scope for a shifting complex of relationships between the principal leaders of the Latin East. The twists and turns of these years have never been properly followed. In this section we look at them from John's perspective, dividing the subject up into two relatively discrete areas.

Cyprus was, of course, not merely a neighbouring monarchy. It was very closely intertwined with the kingdom of Jerusalem. As we have seen, the pair had recently been joined in a 'personal union' under King Aimery (1198–1205), but on his death they had separated again. I have already suggested that John was chosen as king of Jerusalem, in around 1208, partly as a means

¹³⁴ *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 873. There is no dating clause, but the reference to John's marriage to Stephanie of Armenia helps us place the letter to around 1214. See below, 79–80.

¹³⁵ J. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order, from Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford, 1968), esp. 5 n. 1.

¹³⁶ See esp. M. Robson, *St Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (London, 1999), 237.

¹³⁷ See the summary by Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 227.

of cementing a continued close alliance between the two realms.¹³⁸ A high degree of interconnectedness was guaranteed right at the start of John's reign, when the young king Hugh of Cyprus came of age, and married Alice of Champagne (of the royal house of Jerusalem).¹³⁹ Hugh may well have received, as her dowry, the lordship of Jaffa in the kingdom of Jerusalem.¹⁴⁰ If so, then this would have given him an official basis for interference in the internal affairs of John's kingdom.

Relations between the two new rulers quickly got off to a bad start, when each harboured the other's opponent. As we have seen, Walter of Caesarea speedily turned his back on John. Instead, he focused on Cyprus. He was close to King Hugh, and was certainly constable there in 1210.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile, more importantly: the former regent for Hugh, Walter of Montbéliard, fled or was expelled from Cyprus when the young king came of age. Crossing the other way, to the mainland, he became the right-hand man of his cousin, King John.¹⁴²

The breach between the kings soon widened. Walter of Montbéliard and John were both inclined to support the Templars and Bohemund of Antioch and Tripoli in their struggle against King Leo of Cilician Armenia. Hugh, by contrast, promptly sided with Leo.¹⁴³ Subsequently, Hugh backed his close kinsmen, the Ibelins, when the latter sought effectively to depose John in the crisis of 1212–13. As Edbury has noted: '[Hugh's] support for John's opponents is understandable. If, in 1212, John... had stood down from the throne, the regents for his daughter, the child-heiress to Jerusalem, would presumably have been her next heir, her aunt Alice... and her husband' [i.e. Hugh himself].¹⁴⁴ In early 1213 Innocent III accused Hugh of aiding rebels against John's legitimate authority. Specifically, Hugh had imprisoned and maltreated a group of Jerusalemite 'loyalists' who had been obliged to put in at a Cypriot port. The leader of this group was a kinsman of John's, initialled 'O'.¹⁴⁵ As Edbury has pointed out, Odo of Montbéliard is the only kinsman of John's in the East known to have borne this initial.¹⁴⁶ It would thus seem that Hugh had fortuitously captured the nephew of his late enemy, Walter of Montbéliard.

Whilst papal outrage could well have played its part in bringing about Odo's release, it did not end Hugh's active enmity towards John. When the

¹³⁸ Above, 44. ¹³⁹ See Genealogy 2, above.

¹⁴⁰ See Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 80–1. ¹⁴¹ Above, 67–8.

¹⁴² See esp. BC, I, doc. b-33; Colbert-Fontainebleau, 315–16; and Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 44–5.

¹⁴³ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 315–17; Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 46.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 41, 47–8. ¹⁴⁵ BC, I, doc. b-36.

¹⁴⁶ Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 46 n. 28.

Ibelins failed to bring John down, they moved to focus on Cyprus instead. There they soon rose extremely high, as close kinsmen to the king.¹⁴⁷ However, in mid-1213 the Hospitallers may have succeeded in bringing about a measure of détente between John and Hugh.¹⁴⁸ In 1217 one of John's barons, Garnier the German, was amongst those sent to Cyprus, apparently to ask Hugh formally to participate in the Fifth Crusade. In the event, Hugh did come with his host.¹⁴⁹ Yet these phases of apparent rapprochement were intermingled with further incidents of hostility. In early 1216, perhaps, Innocent III still seems to have felt it necessary to ask all the leading secular powers in the Latin East to cooperate, or at least to suspend their quarrels, in the interests of the forthcoming crusade.¹⁵⁰ When Hugh came to Acre at the start of that expedition, he brought with him, in his retinue, both the Ibelins and Walter of Caesarea.¹⁵¹ Although this was understandable, it would not have appeared very friendly.

The 'War of the Antiochene Succession' is an umbrella term for a series of conflicts fought out in northern Syria between 1201 and 1219. During these years two candidates were competing for the Antiochene throne: Bohemund IV of Antioch and Tripoli, and the young Raymond-Roupen, whose cause was vigorously pressed by his great-uncle, King Leo of Cilician Armenia. The war quickly became much more complex. The two principal military orders lined up on opposite sides. Leo won the support of the Hospital, but thoroughly alienated the Templars – above all, by his retention of their former fortress of Baghras. In 1211 Leo launched a series of particularly destructive attacks against the order. The new master of the Temple, William of Chartres, was seriously wounded. Innocent III ordered that an existing sentence of excommunication against Leo should be much more strictly enforced – no one was to assist the king against the Templars in any way – and he instructed King John to comply, and urge his subjects accordingly.¹⁵²

In the event, John went above and beyond this: he supported the Templars militarily against Leo. We have already identified various reasons why John could well have been keen to get involved in another war, so soon after the disappointing 1210–11 Crusade.¹⁵³ But it is worth noting that the force John sent north was apparently quite small, comprising some fifty knights, and that the king did not lead it himself.¹⁵⁴ We may

¹⁴⁷ See esp. *ibid.*, 47–8. ¹⁴⁸ Below, 79. ¹⁴⁹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 322.

¹⁵⁰ *BC*, I, doc. b-43. ¹⁵¹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 322.

¹⁵² See *BC*, I, doc. b-32; see also the best summary of this war that we have, which remains C. Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche* (Paris, 1940), 596–617.

¹⁵³ Above, 57. ¹⁵⁴ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 317.

conclude that he was doing the bare minimum to reap the political benefits he wanted.

Nevertheless, this was the beginning of a period when John became far more involved than before in northern affairs. John's support for the Temple could well have been significant in pushing Leo to change tack. As late as February 1213 Innocent III was still repeating his hostility to Leo, writing to the kings of Jerusalem and Cyprus, and others, ordering them not to advise or assist Leo but, rather, to avoid him as an excommunicate.¹⁵⁵ However, by the end of the year Leo had restored almost all the Templar territory he had taken (except Baghras, which he kept until 1216). In return, the pope granted Leo absolution.¹⁵⁶ Leo's goal at this time was plainly to detach Bohemund's key allies, namely the Templars, Innocent and John. Leo largely achieved this objective. (To add to Bohemund's misery, his eldest son, Raymond, was murdered in 1213 by a band of Assassins in Tortosa Cathedral.)¹⁵⁷ The Hospital may well have played the crucial role in bringing John and Leo into an actual alliance with one another. It is readily believable that, after the crisis of 1212–13, John was on the lookout for powerful new friends. The Hospital's ally, Leo, was amongst the most formidable Latin Christian rulers in the East at this time, and he was certainly the most aggressive of them.

The Hospital may even have contrived to get its mutually antagonistic allies, John and Hugh, to work together a little. In about 1214 the order organised an attack on the northern Ayyubid cities of Hama and Homs. It is possible that the Hospitallers received aid from all three kings, Leo, John and Hugh, but the expedition was bought off with a tribute before it had got under way.¹⁵⁸

John's alliance with Leo reached its peak when John remarried, apparently in 1214. His new wife was Leo's eldest daughter, Stephanie (sometimes called 'Rita').¹⁵⁹ Since Leo had no surviving sons, Stephanie was a plausible claimant to succeed him in Cilicia. However, Leo himself had formally acknowledged his great-nephew as his heir: the claimant to Antioch, Raymond-Roupen.¹⁶⁰ John's marriage to Stephanie thus reopened a glimmer of possibility, now completely closed off in the kingdom of Jerusalem, that John might yet sire a line of Brienne kings in the

¹⁵⁵ BC, I, doc. b-39. ¹⁵⁶ See esp. *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 863.

¹⁵⁷ See Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades*, 620.

¹⁵⁸ At Bohemund's instigation, it was directed instead against the Assassin stronghold of Khawabi. See Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades*, 620–1.

¹⁵⁹ For the marriage, see esp. Colbert-Fontainebleau, 320; Ernoul-Bernard, 411; and above, 76.

¹⁶⁰ See esp. *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, nos. 843, 869–70; and Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades*, 618.

East. But probably this was not the crucial selling point for John when he was negotiating for the marriage. At the time, he may well have been focused on two things, above all: on strengthening his compact with Leo, and on the sizeable dowry that Stephanie brought with her – although this was largely thanks to the Hospital. Determined to seal the marriage alliance between its two leading partners, the order lent Leo more than 30,000 bezants to facilitate it.¹⁶¹ The master of the Hospital himself, Garin of Montaigu, sailed to the mouth of the river Tarsus to collect the bride.¹⁶²

The marriage proved fruitful in that a son was born to the couple, probably before the start of the Fifth Crusade.¹⁶³ But the alliance between John and his new father-in-law proved even shorter-lived than that son. As early as 1215–16, as we have seen, the pope was asking John, Leo, Hugh and Bohemund to put aside their quarrels, at the very least, for the good of the forthcoming crusade. However, the letter does not quite make it clear who had fallen out with whom.¹⁶⁴ It is believable, though, that there was trouble between John and Leo, soon after their alliance was consummated in about 1214. Maybe, as soon as John's son was born, John had demanded a formal acknowledgement from Leo that the infant was now the heir to Cilician Armenia (as closer in blood to Leo than Raymond-Roupen). It is even possible that John broke with Leo simply because the latter had proved too successful for John's liking. In February 1216 Leo finally captured Antioch, whilst Bohemund was absent at Tripoli.¹⁶⁵ Bohemund came to Acre in autumn 1217, at the start of the Fifth Crusade – and this may be the first sign that things had begun to improve between him and John.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, in early 1218 John recognised him as the rightful prince of Antioch, in a curious *actum* that brought several old opponents together (Bohemund and the master of the Hospital, and King John himself and Walter of Caesarea). Was this an attempt at peace-making, in the interests of the crusade? If so, it did not really work.¹⁶⁷ The truth is that John was unwilling to do more for Bohemund than merely recognise him as prince. The king would not countenance diverting the Fifth Crusade to Antioch, which is what Bohemund really wanted. In the end, John had no role in the process by which Bohemund eventually recaptured the city, in 1219.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, nos. 869–70, and also no. 873.

¹⁶² *La chronique attribuée au connétable Smbat*, tr. and ed. G. Dédéyan (Paris, 1980), 89.

¹⁶³ See Colbert-Fontainebleau, 349. ¹⁶⁴ Above, 78.

¹⁶⁵ See Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades*, 621. ¹⁶⁶ Below, 91–3.

¹⁶⁷ See below, 92–3; and *UKJ*, III, D. 635. ¹⁶⁸ Below, 112.

‘Scandals in both East and West’

We can know only a little about John’s relations with the West between 1210 and 1217, despite the fact that they must have been particularly important to him. Nonetheless, it *is* possible to say rather more than has been done so far, if we give a full and proper treatment to the ‘Erard of Brienne affair’.¹⁶⁹

What follows is a brief summary of its main events. As we have seen, at around the same time as John’s accession in 1210, Alice of Champagne-Jerusalem had been married off to King Hugh of Cyprus. But her younger sister, Philippa, remained a potential source of danger to the regent of Champagne, Countess Blanche, and to her young son, Theobald IV.¹⁷⁰ Just over a couple of years later John’s prematurely widowed young cousin, Erard of Brienne, who had remained in Champagne, publicised his intention of seeking Philippa’s hand in marriage. As lord of Venizy and half of Ramerupt, Erard was ultimately Blanche’s vassal for his ‘great holdings’, in much the same way that King John still was for his own Western lands. But these ties did not prevent Erard from moving against the countess and her son. It was obvious that, having married Philippa, Erard would then seek to advance her (rather debatable) claim to the county of Champagne.

Erard skilfully placed himself under ecclesiastical protection, by taking the cross, before outlining his marriage scheme to the French king, Philip Augustus. Philip had earlier established himself as the chief protector of Blanche and young Theobald, but it was obviously in his interests to keep Blanche feeling rather insecure. So Philip’s response to Erard was, in some ways, studiously non-committal. For her own part, Blanche seized Erard’s fiefs in Champagne, and even had him imprisoned for a time whilst he was en route to the East. Meanwhile, she obtained various papal rulings. One confirmed that Count Henry II of Champagne’s marriage to Queen Isabella I of Jerusalem had been invalid. Their daughters, Alice and Philippa, were therefore illegitimate, and so could not inherit. Another declared that the projected marriage between Erard and Philippa would not be lawful, since the couple were too closely related (in the ninth degree, in civil law). A papal bull was dispatched to the Latin East, threatening excommunication if the illicit wedding were performed.

¹⁶⁹ I have already offered some thoughts on this subject in “‘Scandalia... tam in oriente quam in occidente’: the Briennes in East and West, 1213–1221”, *Crusades* 10 (2011), 63–77.

¹⁷⁰ See above, Genealogy 2.

Nevertheless – shockingly – it did take place. By mid-1215 Erard and his bride were sailing back to France. He was arrested twice more on the way, finally making it back to Champagne, with Philippa, after a round trip of some two and a half years. Capitalising largely on Brienne loyalties and connections, Erard soon rallied a surprising number of disaffected lords and knights to his cause. The Champenois civil war, feared for some fifteen years, finally broke out at around the start of 1216.

The war itself proved disastrous for Erard. In the event, the greatest authorities in the West rounded on him and his supporters, casting them firmly in the role of disloyal, ambitious disturbers of the peace. Erard and Philippa were duly excommunicated, and similar ecclesiastical sanctions were also fired off against their *coadjutores* and *fautores*. The struggle drew sharply to its climax in 1218, when Erard's most powerful backer, the duke of Lorraine, was forced out of the war by the combined forces of Blanche and her allies (the emperor-elect Frederick II, the duke of Burgundy and the count of Bar). Nevertheless, it was not until November 1221 that Erard and Philippa began to relinquish their claim to Champagne. When they finally did so, not only did Erard formally receive back his fiefs, but the couple's marriage was acknowledged, and they obtained a down payment of 4,000 *l.* and a lifetime rent of 1,200 *l.* This was 'a handsome reward for... persistence, sufficient to place [Erard] amongst the wealthiest barons of [Champagne]'.¹⁷¹ In the end, he had done rather well out of it all.¹⁷²

Because the 'Erard of Brienne affair' had a far greater impact on Champagne than it did anywhere else, its influence on other parts of the Latin world has been unduly neglected by historians. This is quite surprising, since even a cursory examination of the subject, as attempted above, shows some of its wider ramifications. The crux of the affair, Erard's marriage, occurred in the kingdom of Jerusalem. Even so, the affair has barely been looked at from any Latin Eastern angle, let alone from the perspective of the leading figure there who was most intimately involved – namely King John himself. Innocent III was clearly right when he wrote that the affair had given rise to 'scandalia... *tam in oriente quam in occidente*'.¹⁷³ The whole business loomed up significantly in the kingdom of Jerusalem, as well as in the West.

¹⁷¹ Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 41.

¹⁷² The above summary is derived chiefly from d'Arbois de Jubainville's detailed treatment in his *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 111–87; and Evergates' outlines in *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 39–42, and *The Cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne* (Toronto, 2009), 3–10.

¹⁷³ Cited by Evergates, *Feudal Society in the Bailliage of Troyes*, 198 (emphasis added). 'Scandalia' is a word often used to signify high-profile sex or marriage troubles.

John's involvement in the affair is best tackled by seeking to answer three questions. First: did John support his cousin's marriage scheme? Second: what actually took place during Erard's stay in the kingdom of Jerusalem? Third: how, and how successfully, did John salvage his own reputation and standing – and, to a lesser extent, the wider Brienne family's – after Erard's wedding?

The genesis of Erard's scheme surely belongs in the context of the Briennes' 'great leap forward' in the early thirteenth century, a process spearheaded by Count Walter III and then by John himself. All three – Walter, John and Erard – used marriage to advance themselves. However, in Erard's case, there was a crucial difference. Unlike Walter and John, Erard was faced with the hostility, not the acquiescence, of the leading interested Western powers. John's own achievement, in becoming king of Jerusalem, was very much more than simply the greatest spark of inspiration to Erard. Erard could underline that he himself hailed from what was now a royal dynasty, and hence that he was of suitable stature to marry Philippa and claim Champagne. Moreover, John's situation probably seemed key to the realisation of Erard's scheme. As king of Jerusalem, and therefore as head of the Jerusalemite royal family, John appeared to be in a position to choose or approve Philippa's husband.¹⁷⁴ Erard drew attention to this specific point when he first outlined his marriage plan to Philip Augustus.¹⁷⁵

John's actual attitude towards the scheme, unfortunately, is not clear. It is easy to suppose that he must surely have supported his cousin for dynastic and family reasons. John would certainly have backed the idea that Alice and Philippa were legitimately born (though not, necessarily, their right to claim Champagne). The reason for this is quite complex, but the essence of it is that Blanche's challenge to their legitimacy opened up a nasty can of worms for the king. It all went back to the question of whether Queen Isabella I of Jerusalem's first marriage, to Humphrey of Toron, had been legitimately annulled in 1190. If it had not been, then Isabella's children by all her subsequent marriages were illegitimate, and so could not inherit. However, this would mean that not only Alice and Philippa were illegitimate but also their half-sister, Queen Maria, and her heirs, effectively annulling John's right to the throne that he had recently struggled so hard to retain.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the papal ruling on this issue, in

¹⁷⁴ Though, as we have seen, Erard proved too closely related to Philippa for the marriage to be lawful.

¹⁷⁵ *Layettes du Trésor des chartes*, ed. A. Teulet et al., 5 vols (Paris, 1863–1909), I, no. 1474.

¹⁷⁶ See esp. Hamilton, 'King consorts of Jerusalem and their entourages from the West', 20; *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade: Sources in Translation*, ed. P. W. Edbury (Aldershot, 1998), 172–3; and Potts, "'Rex, rex electus et dominus Hierosolymitanus'".

Blanche's favour, was – potentially, at least – a tremendous blow to John. Yet it had little effect in the East, it seems. The whole business remained a latent threat to John's kingship, which never properly materialised.

In truth, there were a range of reasons for John either not to assist Erard at all or to do so only covertly. For a start, John had earlier grown into a role as one of Blanche's leading supporters within Champagne. It had been precisely to protect herself against adventurers, such as Erard, that Blanche had vigorously promoted her trusty John's candidacy for the crown of Jerusalem. If King John let her down now, it would be damagingly obvious that this was a case of crude opportunism, designed to advance the Brienne family. Furthermore, it was a particularly bad moment to risk alienating key Western powers. The papacy had recently been instrumental in getting John through the crisis of 1212–13, and a great new crusade (the future Fifth) was just being proclaimed. Finally, John was the first *de jure* king of Jerusalem to rule in the East whilst formally retaining a great Western lordship, the county of Brienne. To maintain this position from the Levant, John was dependent, ultimately, on the goodwill of Countess Blanche in Champagne, of King Philip in France, and of Innocent III as the spiritual father of all Latin Christendom. Openly backing Erard would have meant jeopardising his relations with all three at once.

However, against all this should be set the obvious, glittering attractions of Erard's scheme: a hazardous but breathtaking opportunity for the Briennes to make enormous gains in their homeland, through timely exploitation of their current, transitory phase in possession of the crown of Jerusalem.¹⁷⁷ Such a gamble could well have appealed, more than we know, to the intensely ambitious, risk-taking side of a person such as John.

At some point in 1213–14, John was represented back in Brienne by a new 'procurator' (agent): his kinsman James of Durnay, marshal of the kingdom of Jerusalem.¹⁷⁸ But what did James really return there to do? It is hard to be sure of the answer, but there are a variety of possible explanations. Mayer has suggested that James was sent back to Brienne as part of the crisis of 1212–13, when John's right to his crown was being challenged after Queen Maria's death.¹⁷⁹ Alternatively, we might speculate that James was sent back as a consequence of the Erard of Brienne affair, when Maria's own legitimacy was being debated in the West, and so

¹⁷⁷ Above, 68–9. ¹⁷⁸ 'Catalogue', no. 145.

¹⁷⁹ Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, II, 739–40.

John's right to his throne was again being called into question.¹⁸⁰ But there is a third explanation, which may come closest to the truth. Perhaps James was indeed sent back as part of the Erard of Brienne affair, but, fundamentally, in reaction to Blanche's seizure of the fiefs that Erard held from her in Champagne. This, after all, must have been a highly alarming development for King John – perhaps the most disquieting of the whole affair. Far away, and not on the pulse of events in the West, it could well have seemed, to him, that it was better to be safe than sorry: that he had to act as if *all* the Briennes' holdings in Champagne were in serious danger. Indeed, if Erard had been using the county of Brienne as his main base, as John's *bailli* there since 1210, then the threat to the county itself could well have been notably greater than would otherwise have been the case.¹⁸¹ It is quite believable, then, that John sent James back to Champagne to protect John's own vulnerable territory there, above all by loudly disassociating the king from Erard and his activities. But maybe there was still more for James to do than this. By 1214 Erard was no longer a suitable figure to remain as the effective regent of the county of Brienne (if, indeed, he had ever had this role), not least because he was now coming out to the East. Perhaps, then, James was sent back to Brienne to serve as Erard's replacement, as *bailli* there – at least, until the dust had settled.¹⁸²

What happened, then, during Erard's stay in the Holy Land? Having arrived in the Latin East under the shadow of the papal bull against him, Erard seems to have been obliged to loiter, for some time, in the kingdom of Jerusalem. During these months two noteworthy events occurred, although it is extremely difficult to tease out their precise impact on Erard and his scheme. It is likely that, for Erard, the more significant of the two was the murder of the patriarch and papal legate, Albert of Vercelli. As we have seen, John seems to have moved swiftly to derive what benefit he could from this shocking incident, probably having a key hand in the process by which Ralph of Merencourt became the new patriarch-elect. Erard was surely much in touch with his cousin, the king, during this period. If John was indeed countenancing Erard's scheme, then perhaps they both could have expected a rather more cooperative attitude from John's ally, Ralph, than from the saintly Albert.¹⁸³ At around the same time, Brienne hopes and ambitions began

¹⁸⁰ See above, 83–4. ¹⁸¹ Above, 50.

¹⁸² James was still in Champagne in April 1214 or 1215. He was certainly back in the East by August 1217, and then took part in the Fifth Crusade (*UKJ*, III, DD. 632–3; and a rather critical passage in Colbert-Fontainebleau, 330). He finally returned home for good in the early 1220s (see esp. Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, II, 739–40; and Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 230).

¹⁸³ In view of the papal bull, though, even Ralph would have had to act circumspectly.

to stretch out in a quite different direction, when John himself married Stephanie of Cilician Armenia. Was this as well as, or instead of, Erard's scheme?

Erard's marriage finally took place at the end of this rather mysterious pause. Although the wedding's legality and consequences were much discussed afterwards, few surviving sources look closely at its immediate surrounding circumstances. For these, we have to fall back on Ernoul–Bernard and Colbert–Fontainebleau. Both accounts have serious shortcomings, though. Ernoul–Bernard suggests that it was John's first wife, Queen Maria, who gave her half-sister, Philippa, to Erard. This is certainly untrue: Maria had been dead for more than a year when Erard first arrived in the Latin East.¹⁸⁴ Whilst Ernoul–Bernard can thus be read as placing the marriage too early, Colbert–Fontainebleau would seem to put it too late: at the time of the Fourth Lateran Council, which is plainly incorrect.¹⁸⁵ In what reads like a kind of feminist moment, Colbert–Fontainebleau presents Philippa as quite remarkably proactive in bringing the marriage about, secretly leaving the castle of Acre at night before wedding Erard the next day.¹⁸⁶ However, the two accounts do agree on one fundamental point: that the marriage took place in Acre, behind John's back, whilst the king was away at Tyre.¹⁸⁷ Colbert–Fontainebleau goes on to spell out that, although John was privately delighted with the match, he had to pretend otherwise in public.¹⁸⁸ The newlyweds may have stayed on in the kingdom of Jerusalem for another couple of months, and perhaps this is a further indication that John was not really 'incensed' with them.¹⁸⁹ There is certainly no evidence that he took any direct action against the pair, such as forcibly separating them, or expelling or imprisoning Erard.

What, then, should we make of all this? In his capacity as Philippa's effective guardian, John could surely have prevented the marriage if he had really been determined to do so. Erard had publicised his intention to marry Philippa, and the greatest authorities in the Latin world had united to condemn his scheme. Under these circumstances, John would surely have been justified, in the eyes of his kingdom's elites, in taking action to ensure that Philippa was effectively inaccessible to Erard, even if this meant confining her in a royal fortress (such as the castle at Acre), or in a secure religious establishment. The fact that, by hook or by crook, the

¹⁸⁴ Ernoul–Bernard, 409. ¹⁸⁵ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 319; and below, 87.

¹⁸⁶ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 319. ¹⁸⁷ Ibid.; Ernoul–Bernard, 409.

¹⁸⁸ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 319–20.

¹⁸⁹ See the suggested chronology by d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 115–17; and Colbert–Fontainebleau, 319.

couple *did* marry certainly suggests that John did not carry out any such action properly or decisively. It may thus be best to agree with Colbert-Fontainebleau. In the last analysis, we may guess, John made the marriage possible, when his back was ostentatiously turned.

After the wedding had finally taken place, John had to take action, above all against the (probably well-founded!) rumours that there had been a Brienne stitch-up. Like many other Latin rulers, John sent a representative to the Fourth Lateran Council, held in Rome in November 1215. John's was the Jerusalemite baron John Le Tor. It is well known that, at the council, the canons prohibiting consanguineous matrimony were drastically cut back, reducing the number of prohibited degrees to four in canon law. In the end, this would make it much easier for the Church to recognise Erard's marriage, which would be licit according to the new ruling.¹⁹⁰ It is possible that John's friends and allies played a leading part in pushing for this change. Yet the chances are that they also worked very hard to persuade Innocent III that John was not responsible for the recent shocking wedding. We may say with confidence that Innocent, Philip Augustus and Blanche were all quite shrewd enough to harbour serious suspicions against John. But, in the event, all seem to have taken the easiest and most expedient option, of giving him the benefit of the doubt. In the process, they may well have vindicated his political judgement. Soon after the council, in fact, Innocent came to John's aid once again.¹⁹¹ When, rather later, ecclesiastical sanctions were imposed on Erard's aiders and abettors, King John himself received never a mention, even though he was arguably the greatest of these. In fact, in all the voluminous papal correspondence on the subject of Erard's marriage, there is barely the slightest hint that the papacy held John substantially responsible for it.

By the time of the council, though, the French monarchy had come out far more strongly than before against Erard. Back in mid-1215 Philip Augustus's heir, the future Louis VIII, had written to John. Louis's letter restated the basics of the case as the French crown saw it. Young Theobald's right to inherit could not be challenged before he came of age; and it was unlikely that he could ever be ousted by either Alice or Philippa, since it was well known that neither sister had a valid claim to Champagne. Finally, Erard and Philippa were prohibited from marrying

¹⁹⁰ See canon 50, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I, 257–8; and also d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 116 n. b. This seemingly pro-Erard move was countered by canon 51, which absolutely forbade clandestine marriages, such as Erard's had been.

¹⁹¹ Perhaps *BC*, I, doc. b-43; certainly *Regesta pontificorum Romanorum*, nos. 5180, 5209 (see above, 63).

in any event, since the couple were too closely related. Fraternal but stern, this letter reads like an unmistakable warning to King John.¹⁹² Maybe it was on receipt of the letter that John decided that he had to send an envoy to France promptly, to explain away the uncomfortable fact that the marriage had recently taken place under his very nose. This, then, could well be the main reason why John Le Tor journeyed onward to France after the Fourth Lateran Council.¹⁹³

The most important thing that John did to rebuild bridges with his key Western backers was, in a sense, to do nothing at all: he seems to have given no support of any kind to Erard in the Champenois civil war that followed. Presumably, this is the main reason why there is no sign of any ‘hangover’ from the affair between John and either Philip or Blanche, when John returned to France in 1223. Moreover, this, we should remember, is only just after Erard and Philippa had formally relinquished their claim to Champagne.

For a quite remarkably brief period, then, the Erard of Brienne affair could well have tainted John’s relations with the Western powers on whom he was particularly dependent. But, in the longer term, John managed to benefit from it, as did Erard himself. As has already been noted, many of Erard’s leading supporters in the Champenois civil war were part of the Brienne ‘coterie’, closely connected to the family.¹⁹⁴ As their revolt failed, several of these chief ‘Erardians’ took an honourable exit from a hopeless situation by setting off to take part in the Fifth Crusade – an enterprise led, of course, by John himself. There is no evidence that they held a grudge against the king for not doing more to help them earlier. On the contrary, figures such as Simon of Joinville and Erard of Chacenay stalwartly supported John during the crusade when his leadership of it came under challenge.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, a little-known *actum* seems to show that good relations were restored comparatively quickly (if, indeed, they had ever been lost) between John and Erard himself. In early 1224 King John mediated peace in a dispute between Erard and Albert, abbot of Vauluisant.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² A printed version of this letter is readily available in *PL*, CCXVI, cols. 975–6; and in *The Cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne*, no. 12.

¹⁹³ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 319.

¹⁹⁴ The following names could be mentioned here: Joinville, Châteauvillain, Broyes, Chacenay, Courtenay(-Tanlay), Choiseul and Thil-Châtel. See esp. d’Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 128–31.

¹⁹⁵ Below, 105–9. ¹⁹⁶ See below, Appendix 1, no. 11.

3 The Fifth Crusade

What we now call the 'Fifth Crusade' was formally launched by Pope Innocent III in April 1213. Then followed long years of planning and preparation across Latin Christendom, under papal leadership. The crusade actually began in the Holy Land in the autumn of 1217. In spring the next year it switched to target Egypt, where it soon became bogged down in a lengthy and taxing siege of the port-city of Damietta. During this period the new Egyptian sultan, al-Kamil, made at least one peace offer to the Christians. There was a further round of negotiations just before the crusade's end. It was the eventual capture of Damietta, though, that really brought the latent tensions in the crusader host to a head. A serious dispute broke open, above all between King John, as the leader of the crusade, and the papal legate Pelagius, standing for the distant 'great powers' of the pope and the emperor-elect, Frederick II. John managed to win the lordship of Damietta, at least for the present. However, soon after this, he and many followers quit Egypt altogether, heading back to the Holy Land. They remained there for more than a year. Eventually John was summoned back to participate in a great advance south from Damietta, towards Cairo. But it led to disaster. The Fifth Crusade ended with the crusaders evacuating Egypt altogether in September 1221.

This is not the place for a comprehensive treatment of the whole expedition. Instead, our focus is solely on the crusade from John's perspective – that is, on those aspects of it that affected him most profoundly.

The Fifth Crusade was the hinge of John's reign as king. Everything had been leading up to it, certainly since 1213, and its ultimate failure dictated the course of the rest of John's rule. The unprecedented build-up to the crusade meant that the stakes were extremely high; and the eyes of the West were on John at the centre of this gruelling enterprise, not just as king of Jerusalem but also – most of the time – as the crusade's acknowledged chief leader. In short, there was a great deal of attention and pressure on him, more so than at any other time in his life. The crusade brought into sharper focus many of the problems and issues that had long plagued John

as king of Jerusalem, and added some new ones into the mix. How, and how well, John coped with all this is the main subject of this chapter.

Focusing on John means that the crusade can be reduced, essentially, to a handful of principal themes. These are: how best to achieve the crusade's objective; the 'leadership question';¹ what was to happen to the crusade's main conquests and spoils; and the wider impact of the crusade on John, his rule and the kingdom of Jerusalem. In this way, we can round off the assessment of John's kingship and the situation of the Jerusalemite monarchy just before the crown's great nosedive, which followed, not long afterwards, under the Hohenstaufen.

The Fifth Crusade has not been properly examined from John's perspective for more than seventy years. Of course, the way in which the crusade is interpreted has changed a great deal since then. It is true that studies of it have not yet moved very far from the parameters posited by Powell in 1986.² However, it is now possible to begin to take analysis onto a new level, above all because of a neglected source: a letter of John's to the Emperor-elect Frederick, apparently written just after the capture of Damietta in November 1219.³ This is an important discovery, which confirms the existence of direct contacts between John, the crusade's leader 'on the spot', and its 'absent commander-in-chief', Frederick. Even more importantly, it tells us something of the nature of this interaction, and of how it worked.

The Way of the Cross

The Fifth Crusade's goal was the 'liberation of the Holy Land' – the permanent recovery of the territory of the former 'first' kingdom of Jerusalem, including, most importantly, the Holy City itself. What was not so clear was how best to achieve this objective.

As John himself later acknowledged, in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council had formally approved the idea that, 'through an invasion of . . . [Egypt], the Holy Land may be more easily liberated from infidel hands'.⁴ It seems that it was always intended to go ahead with this, once sufficient men and ships had arrived in the East. In the short term, though, after the

¹ As Powell puts it in his *Anatomy of a Crusade, 1213–1221* (Philadelphia, 1986), ch. 6.

² *Ibid.*, *passim*. However, it is important to note the proceedings of a recent conference, 'Contextualizing the Fifth Crusade', which will be published in the near future by Ashgate.

³ See esp. below, 105–9, and Appendix 2.

⁴ See below, Appendix 2; and also Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 10, in *Die Schriften des kölnen Domscholasters, später Bischofs von Paderborn und Kardinal-Bischofs von S. Sabina, Oliverus*, ed. H. Hoogeweg (Tübingen, 1894).

arrival of the first wave of crusaders at Acre, the crusade began with a series of operations in the Holy Land itself.⁵

Unsurprisingly, the 'leadership question' quickly reared its ugly head.⁶ There were a number of possible candidates for this role – above all King Andrew II of Hungary, who had both the pretensions and, it seems, some papal support to substantiate them.⁷ But no formal leader had been agreed before the crusade had got under way. In the event, no one proved capable of achieving pre-eminence over this 'first phase' in quite the way that Andrew, in particular, wanted (even though it was he who chaired the first great council of the crusade, in the royal Hungarian tent).⁸ This left the door open, and, if anyone stepped into the obvious breach, it was John, not Andrew. It is not particularly difficult to explain why. John was, in fact, the best suited to be leader of all the chief figures present (and these included not only the king of Hungary but also John's old nemesis, King Hugh of Cyprus, Bohemund IV and the duke of Austria). After all, the crusade was being fought to recover John's lost kingdom, and, for the present at least, that kingdom itself was the battleground. Moreover, King John and his Jerusalemites were more than just experienced at fighting in the Holy Land. They knew the local political, military and strategic situation better than almost anyone else. Small wonder, then, that John became the effective leader, in the absence of any overwhelming candidate from the West.

Recent poor harvests in the kingdom of Jerusalem had made it incapable of providing more than short-term supplies for even the first wave of crusaders, let alone for the masses who would follow later.⁹ It is unsurprising, then, that the crusaders' first operation, in autumn 1217, was a 'reconnaissance in force', largely to acquire and stockpile food and fodder. Now a host large enough to move around the Holy Land comparatively freely, the Christians took advantage of their opportunity to visit various sacred sites, such as Capernaum, and also to bathe in the river Jordan. It seems that they were scouring the region around Mount Tabor,

⁵ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 128. A plan that John and various other Latin Easterners had apparently agreed upon, to attack Nablus, was shelved (see *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 902).

⁶ For more on it, see below, 97–103.

⁷ I would like to thank Tom Smith for all his pertinent observations on this point. We might guess that, when Andrew wrote to John and others, to tell them about the plans for a crusader rendezvous on Cyprus, he did so, at least in part, to assert himself as the leader of the enterprise (*BC*, I, doc. c-4).

⁸ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 322–3.

⁹ See *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 902; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 130, 136 n. 23.

preparatory to attacking it.¹⁰ As has already been noted, the fortification of the mountain had been trumpeted around the West as the immediate *casus belli* for the Fifth Crusade, and it did pose a noteworthy threat to the rump kingdom of Jerusalem. It looks as if John was the directing spirit of the subsequent brief campaign against it. Oliver of Paderborn (not, in fact, an eyewitness until a later stage of the crusade) greatly praised John's assault, but he was equally scathing about the fact that the king soon called it off.

King John of Jerusalem, with the army of the Lord, overthrew the castellan and the amir [of Tabor] together in the first assault; he reduced the defenders. . . to flight and terror. But the king then lost as much merit descending as he had gained by ascending; for in coming down on the same day and making others do the same, he encouraged the infidel. . .¹¹

Although Jacques de Vitry was also highly critical, he did add what may be a crucial point: that, at this juncture, the crusaders had no siege machines.¹² But perhaps it is Ernoul–Bernard that gives the best explanation for the crusaders' precipitate withdrawal. The Christians' wary and experienced leaders feared that they would be caught besieging the fortress by a powerful Ayyubid relief force.¹³ John and Bohemund soon got what may well have been their way, and the crusaders returned to Acre.

Not all that long afterwards a foray undertaken by a splinter group of (mainly Hungarian?) crusaders met with disaster in the mountains near Sidon.¹⁴ Soon after this, King Andrew quit the crusade altogether, along with both Bohemund and Hugh of Cyprus. It is believable that John's relationship with all three had either never been good or else had deteriorated sharply during the crusade. Certainly, his dealings with Andrew never constituted the fraternal camaraderie depicted in Glazunov's ballet *Raymonda*. Perhaps there were already serious difficulties between the two by the time of the attack on Mount Tabor (a campaign that Andrew, noticeably, took no part in).¹⁵ Yet the Hungarian king did contrive to do something more for the crusade, as well as for his own long-term interests, by taking the land route home. By his very presence with his army, he '[shored] up the crusaders' distant. . . flank', and possibly encouraged a Seljuq attack on the Ayyubid north, which followed in 1218.¹⁶ Andrew's

¹⁰ Ibid., 130–1. ¹¹ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 3.

¹² Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la cinquième croisade*, 80. ¹³ Ernoul–Bernard, 411–12.

¹⁴ See the summary by Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 132.

¹⁵ It is worth noting the abuse directed against Andrew in Colbert–Fontainebleau, 325.

¹⁶ See Tyerman, *God's War*, 629; and H. Gottschalk, *Al-Malik al-Kamil von Egypten und seine Zeit: eine Studie zur Geschichte Vorderasiens und Egyptens in der ersten Hälfte des 7./13. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1958), 71–6.

choice of route surely encouraged Bohemund to hope that, on the way past, the king of Hungary would do what John had conspicuously failed to do, and help him recover Antioch. As we have seen, John formally recognised Bohemund as the rightful prince in early 1218, but showed no signs of doing anything more for him than that.¹⁷ This, then, was almost certainly the reason why Bohemund left the crusade with Andrew – and why Hugh of Cyprus, never a friend of John's, went with the two of them. This was the last that John would see of Hugh, since the young king died suddenly at Tripoli in early 1218.¹⁸ But it was not the end, fortunately, of Cypriot involvement in the crusade. Walter of Caesarea eventually returned to the fray in 1219, leading more than 100 Cypriot knights to Egypt.¹⁹ According to Oliver of Paderborn, the Cypriots sent 'a great supply of soldiers and funds' to help the Templars when al-Mu'azzam attacked the new 'Château Pèlerin' complex for a second time, in 1220.²⁰

In the months that elapsed between the trio's departure and the arrival of substantial reinforcements, it was necessary to keep the remainder of the host active to stave off the danger of gradual disintegration. So the Templars, the Teutonic Knights and crusader 'helpers' began the construction of the mighty Château Pèlerin complex at 'Atlit, a vital turn in the coast road running south from Acre. Meanwhile, John, the Hospitallers and the duke of Austria refortified the key strategic town of Caesarea, which the coast road led to.²¹ (This seems to have led to renewed difficulties between the king and Walter of Caesarea, who was not present in person at this particular juncture. For some time, perhaps, John confiscated the town – apparently on the grounds that Walter had not reimbursed him for his share of the expenses incurred in refortifying it. However, it is tempting to suggest that this also served as an excuse for John to hit out, threateningly, against Walter, with whom his relations had long been tense.)²² In this way, then, the Christians strengthened their defensive infrastructure, whilst also threatening the Ayyubids with secure bases from which they could march inland. The first phase of the crusade

¹⁷ Above, 80. ¹⁸ See esp. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 47–8.

¹⁹ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 339–40. Walter was the right man to lead the army, as constable of Cyprus in a time of royal minority – but was he also trying to rebuild his relationship with John after the 'Caesarea' incident (see elsewhere on this page)? It is notable that Walter was present, whilst the Ibelins were not there, for the coronation of John's daughter Isabella in 1225 (below, 135).

²⁰ See Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 53; see also below, 115.

²¹ See Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, chs. 5–6; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 133.

²² See esp. Colbert-Fontainebleau, 334; and Tibble, *Monarchy and Lordships in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 127. For a rather different line, see Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 48 n. 36.

thus ended with tangible benefits, to set against its more obvious limitations and failures.²³

By mid-1218 sufficient men and ships had arrived in the East to go ahead with the long-projected invasion of Egypt. Nonetheless, a debate does seem to have followed about whether the crusade's immediate target should be Alexandria or Damietta. In the end, it was agreed to land at Damietta, 'the...key [to] all Egypt'.²⁴ Although excellently sited strategically, Damietta was, in truth, a rather second-rate city by comparison with Alexandria, and certainly with Cairo. To maintain their momentum, then, the crusaders needed to avoid getting bogged down at the very start of their invasion, forcing open the door into Egypt.

This is exactly what happened, though, producing the 'longest static campaign in the history of the eastern crusades' – which, in turn, forcefully resurrected fundamental questions about the crusaders' Egyptian strategy.²⁵ Had they come to Damietta to conquer, destroy or, at a minimum, to cripple Ayyubid Egypt? Or was it intended merely to threaten the above, to pressurise the Ayyubids into relinquishing the Holy Land and City? Neither approach was far-fetched, given the essential fragility of that imposing edifice, the Ayyubid 'empire'. This frailty was revealed most plainly during the crusade, not so much by the Egyptian sultan's repeated peace offers to the Christians as by an attempted coup against him in early 1219.²⁶

Embedded within a great deal of contact, formal and informal, between the two sides, we know most about two 'rounds' of peace proposals put forward by the sultan, the new head of the Ayyubid family, al-Kamil.²⁷ Unfortunately, the precise dates of both are a little problematic. The first seems to have been offered not long before the crusaders finally captured Damietta in late 1219.²⁸ The second came almost two years later, in mid-1221, when the crusaders were at last about to set out on their great advance south from the city, in the direction of Cairo.²⁹ Al-Kamil's terms on both these occasions were very carefully limited in scope, reflecting the precise degree that the crusade, lodged on the delta, had frightened him. He offered the crusaders not far short of everything that they wanted

²³ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 128, 134–5.

²⁴ See esp. Ernoul–Bernard, 414–15; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 137–8.

²⁵ As noted in Tyerman, *God's War*, 629.

²⁶ See esp. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 150; and Tyerman, *God's War*, 648.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 640.

²⁸ For this, see esp. Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, chs. 29, 31; Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 155 n. 61, 159–61; and the 'new' letter, below, in Appendix 2.

²⁹ See Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 71; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 184–7.

in Syria and Palestine – almost the entire former kingdom of Jerusalem, including the Holy City – in return for the immediate evacuation of Egypt.³⁰

A range of sources cumulatively suggest that, on both these occasions, John favoured accepting the sultan's terms, but that he was effectively overruled by the crusade's other leaders.³¹ The 'new crusade letter' already referred to, from John to Frederick II, might appear to reopen the question of whether this is correct vis-à-vis the first occasion. In this letter, although John described the recently rejected terms in some detail, he said nothing whatsoever about having been personally in favour of them. He simply went on to indicate that the terms had been rejected, and that the crusaders had captured Damietta.³² However, we can explain this 'silence' of John's. In his letter, he could well have been glossing over two rather unfortunate points. The first is that he had taken a view that looked mistaken with the benefit of hindsight (in that the rejection of the terms had been followed by the greatest triumph of the crusade so far, the capture of Damietta). Moreover, when pressing his views, he had been overruled by the crusade's other leaders. Wrong, *and* not in control. Drawing attention to any of this would only have undermined John's efforts to present himself to Frederick as a 'safe pair of hands' and the crusade's sole leader.³³

It does still seem to be the case, then, that John was in favour of the proposals on both occasions. Why – what were his reasons? Presumably, he argued that the terms conceded to the Latins virtually everything they had set out to achieve in the Holy Land. The current campaign in Egypt could well have seemed to him both more difficult and uncertain. From a self-interested angle, the proposed deal would provide him, at a stroke, with a much-expanded kingdom in the Holy Land – whereas, in Egypt, his right to claim the crusade's conquests was strongly contested, as we shall see.³⁴ Before we write off John's outlook as primarily selfish, it is worth noting just how many people agreed with him; and comparatively few of these were his 'creatures', obviously bound to back him. On the first occasion, John is variously said to have had the support of the French, most of the Jerusalemites 'and those from across the mountains', 'the

³⁰ John himself describes the terms that were offered on the first occasion in his letter – written, it seems, soon afterwards – to Frederick II. See esp. below, 107, and Appendix 2.

³¹ See esp. Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, chs. 31, 71; and Colbert-Fontainebleau, 342. Jacques de Vitry strongly hinted that John had been in favour, by pointedly *not* mentioning him in his list of those against the proposed terms (*Lettres de la cinquième croisade*, 138).

³² See esp. below, Appendix 2. ³³ For more on this, see below, 105–9.

³⁴ See esp. below, 103–11.

leaders of the Germans' and the Teutonic Knights, the English earl of Chester and a few of the clergy. Even if we should not simply conflate all this, it is a pretty impressive list.³⁵ On the second occasion, after his return to Damietta, John may well have had the backing not only of the barons of his kingdom but also of the Temple and the Hospital, something that he certainly had not had the first time around.³⁶ Furthermore, with the benefit of hindsight soon after the failure of the crusade, Oliver himself conceded that the king had been right this time: 'King John, considering the matter more deeply, wisely showed that the proposal often proffered by the enemy ought [now] to be accepted. . .'.³⁷

Why, then, were John's views rejected both times? On the first occasion, there were a multiplicity of counter-arguments, and, taken together, they were strong enough that even John's trusty patriarch, Ralph of Merencourt, sided against the king.³⁸ At the time, many crusaders could well have believed – quite rightly – that Damietta would soon be captured. This being so, surely it would be better to negotiate later from a position of greater strength? There were doubts, too, about whether the sultan would or could keep his side of the bargain. It is particularly worth noting here al-Kamil's promise to return the True Cross. A bad precedent was provided by the fact that Saladin had agreed the same, back in 1191, but had conspicuously failed to hand it over. In fact, it never would be returned.³⁹ On a literally more down-to-earth level, the land that al-Kamil was proposing to relinquish belonged more directly to his brother al-Mu'azzam, the sultan of Syria. The Christians had good reason to doubt whether al-Kamil was really in a position to deliver this projected cession of much of his brother's land.⁴⁰ What would happen even if al-Kamil did all that he said? Whilst he had offered the Christians almost the entire former kingdom of Jerusalem, including the Holy City, he had carefully withheld the key southern Transjordanian castles of Kerak and Montréal. Contemporary opinion held – soundly, surely – that these castles were essential to the basic defensibility of the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, as Tyerman has acutely noted, 'any evacuation of Egypt after the struggles of

³⁵ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 31; Colbert-Fontainebleau, 342, and also 339. Powell has shown that it may be appropriate to bring together these sections of Colbert-Fontainebleau (*Anatomy of a Crusade*, 155 n. 61).

³⁶ See esp. Ernoul-Bernard, 442; and also Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 71. For the changing attitudes of the two principal military orders, see esp. M. Barber, *The New Knighthood: a History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge, 1995), 129–30; and J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, c.1050–1310* (London, 1967), 142–3.

³⁷ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 71.

³⁸ Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la cinquième croisade*, 138. ³⁹ See esp. *ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁰ But see Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 169–70.

1218–19 would almost certainly have led the crusade to break up, [so] exposing [the Latin East] to immediate vulnerability. . .’.⁴¹ Taking all this together, it is not surprising that the terms were rejected.

On the second occasion, whilst most of these arguments retained their force, a couple of new developments were thrown in as well. One was the incalculable influence of prophetic literature, which seemed to foretell a resounding success if the crusade continued. Hamilton has demonstrated that we must not minimise the importance of these texts. They could well have helped shape the nature and timing of the crusade’s last, disastrous advance, which John helped to lead.⁴² However, for our purposes, there is another, still more significant point. By now, John’s position as the crusade’s leader had come to mean far less than at the time of the first offer (as we shall see).⁴³ The crusade was really under the thumb of a papal-imperial condominium, led by the papal legate, Pelagius, and Frederick II’s representative, Duke Louis of Bavaria. John was in no position to push through acceptance of the sultan’s terms when the legate and the duke were both firmly against the proposed deal.⁴⁴ John’s views were thus overruled again, and the chances are that this took place much more easily than the first time around. Small wonder, then, that the king became increasingly despondent as the crusade’s final, soggy catastrophe approached.⁴⁵

‘Seizing the lordship of the crusader host’

Whatever choices were made on deep matters, such as strategy, they had to be implemented on the spot. This brings us naturally to the ‘leadership question’.

Powell has rightly underlined that ‘the [Fifth] crusaders were not a standing army in the field, awaiting a commander; . . . they were a *force*’.⁴⁶ To be a little more precise: a force that consisted of leaders and contingents coming and going, in an ‘incessant merry-go-round of arrivals and departures’.⁴⁷ Many of the resulting problems were compounded by the fact that – after 1218, at least – the number of departees consistently exceeded the number of arrivals, so that the crusader host inexorably diminished in

⁴¹ Tyerman, *God’s War*, 639–40.

⁴² See B. Hamilton, ‘Continental drift: Prester John’s progress through the Indies’, in C. F. Beckingham and B. Hamilton, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot, 1996), 241–6; and ‘The impact of Prester John on the Fifth Crusade’ (unpub. paper, delivered at Canterbury, 14 April 2012).

⁴³ Below, 116–17.

⁴⁴ See esp. Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 71; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 186–7.

⁴⁵ See esp. below, 117–18. ⁴⁶ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 118 (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ Tyerman, *God’s War*, 634.

numbers.⁴⁸ All this was operating within a climate of ‘robust, [but sometimes] awkward and unpredictable [popular] participation...in ways unusual in normal, contemporary Western warfare’.⁴⁹ There was no single, plainly preponderant figure leading the crusade on the spot. The crusade could be, and was, run by a constantly changing committee of its main leaders. But, as on previous expeditions that had operated in this way, there was a crucial need for a clear and decisive military structure – above all, for a sole ultimate commander.⁵⁰ That commander, though, might well have his own ideas about just how far his leadership over the crusade extended. It is worth adding that the cohesion of the whole expedition had to be provided by those in a position to offer overarching, authoritative leadership for several years on the trot. Whilst many of these factors did indeed weaken the crusade, they also played into John’s hands.

Although John eventually emerged as the crusade’s chief, this *was* unprecedented, and not what had been intended by the crusade’s principal architect, Innocent III. No previous king of Jerusalem had ever been the formally designated leader of a great crusade, although several of them had played vital roles hosting, advising and sometimes directing crusader forces. It was much more normal for the greatest Western leader, coming out on a given crusade, to be that crusade’s chief. Innocent had plainly intended to preside personally over the process of choosing such a leader, at the crusade’s projected muster at Brindisi and Messina, before the crusaders sailed to the Holy Land.⁵¹ However, that muster, and another planned for Cyprus, never took place, and Innocent had died by the time that the crusade actually got under way.⁵² Subsequently, the efforts of his successor, Honorius III, to establish Andrew of Hungary as the crusade’s formal chief do not seem to have yielded the results that the papacy hoped for. We have seen that during the first phase of the crusade, in the Holy Land itself, it was John who emerged as the expedition’s *de facto* leader.

Shortly after the crusade moved to Egypt, John consolidated his position by becoming its formal, agreed chief. The crusade had, in fact, already witnessed various lesser ‘leadership elections’, according to the mainly military needs of particular circumstances.⁵³ Indeed, by the time

⁴⁸ Despite initiatives, such as Pelagius’s, to ban further departures. See Ernoul–Bernard, 428, which is admittedly very hostile to the legate.

⁴⁹ Adapted from Tyerman, *God’s War*, 632–3. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 643.

⁵¹ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 111.

⁵² It may well be no accident that the surviving register of Pope Honorius opens with a letter to King John, reassuring him that the crusade was still on its way (Honorius III, *Regesta*, ed. P. Pressutti, 2 vols. (Rome, 1888–95), I, no. 1). Honorius also invited John and other Latin Eastern leaders to send envoys to the proposed crusader rendezvous on Cyprus (BC, I, docs. c-3, c-4).

⁵³ See, for instance, Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 123.

that John disembarked in Egypt, one such leader had already been elected there in this way. Count Simon of Saarbrücken was chosen to command in the hiatus between most of the crusader host anchoring off Damietta and the arrival of the main leaders, who followed soon afterwards.⁵⁴ The count’s fifteen minutes of fame (in truth, rather longer than this) ended when the host was fully assembled. Then, as Colbert-Fontainebleau states, ‘[the Christians] elected a chief (‘cheveteine’)’. ‘And by agreement of all’, we are told, ‘King John of Jerusalem was elected. . .’⁵⁵

It is entirely understandable that the crusaders moved so decisively to shore up their command structure at the beginning of their great new enterprise, the invasion of Egypt. It is equally explicable that they elected John as their chief. He was the only crowned head present, whose kingdom they were fighting to restore, as well as a figure of considerable experience of politics and war in the East. But Colbert-Fontainebleau quickly brings in an additional issue of vital importance. The text states unequivocally that, by becoming chief, John acquired not only ‘the lordship of the [crusader] host’ (whatever precisely that means) but also lordship ‘over the conquests that [the host] would make, saving only the parts allotted to those who took part in the conquest’.⁵⁶ The disposition of conquests had not been an issue in the previous ‘Holy Land’ phase of the expedition, and this was not simply because the crusade had not made any notable conquests there. Although, at the time, John had only been de facto chief, conquests made in the Holy Land would generally have reverted to him anyway, being restored to the kingdom of Jerusalem. But the crown did not have such generally accepted rights to new territory won in Egypt.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, leaders of earlier crusades had often disposed of ‘their’ crusade’s conquests, especially when there was no obvious Latin lord or polity to return them to. So, by becoming the crusade’s formal chief at this specific point, John was putting himself in as strong a position as he could, to continue to receive any conquests that the expedition might make.⁵⁸

John certainly looks like the crusade’s central figure until almost the end of 1218 – that is, for six months or so. After the crusade’s first significant success in Egypt, the capture of Damietta’s ‘chain tower’ in August, prisoners were paraded in front of the king.⁵⁹ On the Egyptian side, the Coptic

⁵⁴ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 10. ⁵⁵ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 329.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁵⁷ But see A. Murray, ‘The place of Egypt in the strategic thinking of the crusades, 1099–1221’ (unpub. paper, delivered at Canterbury, 13 April 2012).

⁵⁸ See esp. below, 103–11.

⁵⁹ *Gesta obsidionis Damiate*, 76, in *Quinti belli sacri scriptores minores*, ed. R. Röhrich (Geneva, 1879).

History of the Patriarchs notes that, a few months later, John ordered the hanging of a pair of crusaders who had been condemned for cowardice. Whether the substance of this story is true or not – and there is no good reason to doubt it – it shows that the Egyptians, too, recognised John's authority over the expedition at this time.⁶⁰ Yet this leadership was plainly not effective domination over an immense and diverse crusader host, after the manner of earlier, greater, Western monarchs. There is room to doubt how much more John was than the supreme military commander of the crusade, and the respected chair of its council of leaders.

John could well have sought to bolster his position by capitalising on his ability as a commander and his personal military prowess. He was plainly both a fine war leader and his own best knight, yet capable of showing considerable caution (often an admirable quality in situations in which manpower is precious).⁶¹ This combination of features was evident in the spring of 1219, when John dispatched two scouts, one after the other, to reconnoitre carefully al-Kamil's abandoned camp near Damietta.⁶² As for John's valiant feats on crusade, it is simply a question of picking the best from a bunch, though we should always bear in mind our chroniclers' penchants for hyperbole. Patrolling the west bank of the river Nile when Ayyubid forces were spotted about to attack the crusader camp, John apparently 'fought manfully [and] harried the retreating enemy back to their ships, yet they proved unable to escape the swords of their pursuers or the gulf of the river'.⁶³ Following a morale-busting defeat on 29 August 1219, the king did much to avert a possible rout by covering the crusader infantry's withdrawal. In the process, we are told, he narrowly escaped being badly burned by Greek fire.⁶⁴ Even as the crusade's final retreat ground to a halt in the 'sticky morass' of the flooded Nile Delta, John and his knights kept their discipline. 'Amidst all this trouble, King John made an attack on the Turks who were opposite him, and returned safely to his own battle line.'⁶⁵

The most dramatic – the most overstated! – of all these deeds is one that finds mention both in Colbert-Fontainebleau and in the chronicle attributed to the eyewitness crusader, John of Tolve. (It is unfortunate that this chronicle has ended up with the title *De domino Iohanne rege Ierusalem*, since, for all its interest and importance, it has comparatively little to say about the king.)⁶⁶ In October 1218 al-Kamil unleashed a particularly

⁶⁰ *Extraits de l'histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie relatifs au siège de Damiette*, tr. E. Blochet, *Revue de l'Orient latin* 11 (1907), 245.

⁶¹ For more on this, see esp. below, 177–8. ⁶² Colbert-Fontainebleau, 336.

⁶³ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 18. ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 29.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. 75; also Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 189.

⁶⁶ This text can be found printed in *Quinti belli sacri scriptores minores*, 119–40.

heavy assault across a pontoon south of Damietta. This attack was spear-headed by a giant heavily armed Turk who was 'so tall that he surpassed everyone'. The sultan, we are told, considered him the equal of 100 Christians. Colbert-Fontainebleau offers a lengthy, vivid and over-the-top account of the ensuing one-on-one combat, but the gist of it is clear: '[O]ur Lord saved the Christians... by the hand of good King John.'⁶⁷

The principal challenges to John's leadership met in the person of the papal legate, Pelagius, who joined the crusade in the autumn of 1218. Pelagius quickly became almost unprecedentedly prominent for a legate on crusade, and this can make him look rather like a throwback to the days of the First Crusade and Adhemar of Le Puy. As legate, Pelagius stood for the newly aggrandised, post-Innocentian papacy, which had largely succeeded in consolidating its position as the active, directing centre of all the 'business of the Holy Land', and which was not prepared to 'lose control' of the Fifth Crusade, in the way that it had the Fourth (1202–4). Pelagius helped lead out to the East a sizeable contingent of crusaders, perhaps mainly from the Papal State itself. Much more importantly, though, he had been entrusted with the disbursement of enormous sums of money that the Church had collected for the expedition. Clerical taxation across the whole of Latin Christendom, for crusading purposes, had been one of the most important initiatives of the late Pope Innocent.⁶⁸ Pelagius's control of the purse strings naturally brought increased clout and authority to him – and especially in a situation in which there was no great lay leader whose own resource base was bankrolling the crusade. But there is a further point well worth mentioning here. Pelagius has often been taken to task, by historians, for his 'arrogance and imperious self-confidence'. If we are more charitable, though, we could regard these as reflecting his unwavering belief in his mission, and his fidelity to his legatine mandate, as he perceived it.⁶⁹

For all this, it was something else that really problematised Pelagius's relationship with John. The legate's role, essentially, was to preserve the crusade until the emperor-elect and king of Sicily, Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, was ready to come out to Egypt to lead it.⁷⁰ This meant that Pelagius naturally regarded John merely as the crusade's interim 'chief'. The legate's principal tasks included safeguarding the interests and rights of the absent Frederick. Arguably, this would not have posed such a problem for John if Pelagius had not had so many ready-made allies

⁶⁷ Ibid., 122; Colbert-Fontainebleau, 333–4.

⁶⁸ See Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 89–106, 117, 144; and also T. Smith, 'The role of Pope Honorius III in the Fifth Crusade' (unpub. paper delivered at Canterbury, 13 April 2012).

⁶⁹ Tyerman, *God's War*, 632. ⁷⁰ Adapted from *ibid.*, 633.

within the crusader host. As is well known, the Fifth Crusade was dominated by those who hailed from Frederick's own territories in Germany and Italy.⁷¹ In short, it looks as though it was the 'papal-Hohenstaufen rapprochement', per se, that was the problem. John's attitude towards this alliance is examined in more detail shortly. It should suffice to say here that John does seem to have wanted the papacy to pressurise Frederick into coming out to Egypt, to lead the crusade to victory. But, until that time came, John was determined that his own headship of the crusade should not be compromised.⁷²

It looks as if the legate swiftly replaced John as the crusade's central figure in the months immediately following his arrival. Yet there was little trouble between the two as yet. During the long, dark winter of 1218–19, we can see Pelagius employing his authority – as well as his evident personal charisma – to keep the crusader host together and boost its faltering morale, after a series of highly unpleasant and damaging disasters.⁷³ It is worth interjecting here Francis of Assisi's visit to Egypt in the summer of 1219: a stay that climaxed in his famous trip to try to convert the sultan, al-Kamil.⁷⁴ During Francis's brief period in the crusader camp, he may well have had his first and only face-to-face meeting with John. However, it is not clear how much contact Francis had with the crusade's leadership. Ernoul–Bernard presents 'two clerics' (surely Francis and his companion) harassing Cardinal Pelagius for permission to go and perform their holy mission.⁷⁵ Francis's later biographer, Thomas of Celano, suggests that the future saint publicly prophesied against a particular advance, but it is not clear whether Francis spoke to the leaders or to the host more generally.⁷⁶ What is beyond doubt is that Francis never seems to have had any difficulty combining the most exquisite humility with demands for the attention of the mighty. Perhaps the best indicator that Francis and John personally encountered one another is John's subsequent, deepening attachment to the Franciscan Order.⁷⁷ Although John

⁷¹ See esp. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 67–87, 117, and his appendices 2, 3 (207–51).

⁷² Below, 103–9.

⁷³ See esp. John of Tolve, *De domino Iohanne rege Ierusalem*, 124–5, in *Quinti belli sacri scriptores minores*. For a treatment of the context, see Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 147–50. Ernoul–Bernard is so hostile to Pelagius that it regrets that he survived the plague in the crusader camp (417).

⁷⁴ This subject and its afterlife have been re-examined, in some detail, by J. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian–Muslim Encounter* (Oxford, 2009).

⁷⁵ Ernoul–Bernard, 431–2.

⁷⁶ Thomas of Celano, *Vita secunda S. Francisci Assisiensis*, part 2, ch. 4, in *Analecta Franciscana* (Quaracchi, 1885–), X, fasc. 2.

⁷⁷ Below, 144, 169–74, 180–8.

and Francis may only have met once in life, it is possible that they still lie near each other, as we shall see.⁷⁸

Soon after Francis's visit came the first sign of major tension and disagreement between Pelagius and John; and, if either's views were in the ascendant, it was the legate's. Pelagius helped lead the opposition to the sultan's 'first round' of peace proposals in the autumn of 1219 – proposals that John, the crusade's chief, wanted to accept.

King 'in' Damietta

Matters came to a head between Pelagius and John following the capture of Damietta, which finally took place on 4–5 November 1219. In the end, it was a 'bloodless victory over a dying city'.⁷⁹ Colbert-Fontainebleau's account carefully underlines two themes: John's leadership, and the prominence of Balian of Sidon. According to Colbert-Fontainebleau, it was John who first apprised the legate and the rest of the crusade's leaders that 'he could have the city when he wanted'. The first crusaders inside Damietta raised King John's standard as a signal to the rest of the host. The remaining Ayyubid lieutenants in the city duly surrendered, apparently to Balian of Sidon, who in turn handed the citadel over to John.⁸⁰ Yet this account should plainly be treated with caution. It was written with the benefit of hindsight, above all about the disputes that broke open soon after Damietta's capture, as to who should have the city and the spoils within it.

But how soon, exactly? It is difficult to fix a precise timeline. It has often been thought that John was able to triumph over Pelagius, and take possession of Damietta, largely by taking advantage of the unpopularity that the legate had incurred in the matter of the division of the plunder. But this view appears to rest on a misreading of the chronology. It was not, it seems, until rather later – in December and January – that the crusaders rioted against Pelagius's distribution of the spoils, whereas there is good reason to believe that the debate as to whom Damietta should belong to for the present was settled by 11 November, within a week or so of the city's capture. On that day an 'official' report was composed, and the crusade's leaders collectively sent it to Honorius III. As Powell has suggested, the order in which the leaders' names appear in the report implies that, by then, John had made good his claim to Damietta (for the time being, at least), and so the city was attached to the crown of Jerusalem. The first-named, most notably, were the spiritual and temporal heads of the kingdom: the patriarch Ralph of Merencourt, and King John himself.

⁷⁸ Below, 183–8. ⁷⁹ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 162.

⁸⁰ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 346.

Then followed the remaining clerical leaders, with Pelagius a fair way down, in his capacity as bishop of Albano.⁸¹ It does look as though he had already lost the argument.

Pelagius's views as to Damietta's immediate future now seem pretty clear. It was the legate, not King John, who had been entrusted by the pope with the disposition of the crusade's conquests and other acquisitions.⁸² Moreover, Pelagius was deeply mindful of his task to preserve the position and rights of the 'absent commander-in-chief', Frederick II. We may well guess that a vociferous multitude of Frederick's subjects and supporters within the crusader host were urging the legate not to cede Damietta to John, who was, after all, merely the interim leader of the crusade. Fortified, presumably, by this 'Hohenstaufen' backing, Pelagius resisted John's claim to Damietta for some time after the capture of the city. Instead, the legate argued – not entirely unselfishly – that Damietta should belong to all, under the Church, at least until Frederick's arrival.⁸³

However, John insisted on his right to the city. He had several good reasons to press so hard on this point. Possession of Damietta, the sole great acquisition of the crusade to date, would emphatically reassert John's leadership over the expedition. Conversely, 'losing' it would be to confirm that his headship was little more than nominal. Even more significantly, it must have been a financial nightmare for John to fight a crusade for more than two years, and maintain a standing army in Egypt for eighteen months, with very little to show for it until now.⁸⁴ By the end of 1219 John clearly needed control of Damietta to provide him with essential cash flow and other resources.

This could well explain why John felt it necessary to crank up the pressure on Pelagius. The *De domino Iohanne* states that the king armed three galleys and threatened to withdraw from the crusade if his right to Damietta was not acknowledged.⁸⁵ This statement, although plausible, does have a certain ring of hindsight about it, since John did indeed leave the main body of the crusade relatively soon afterwards. But, whatever John did, Pelagius soon caved in. The king was to have the city – at least, until the arrival of Frederick II.⁸⁶

⁸¹ The text of this letter can be found in R. Röhrich, *Studien zur Geschichte des fünften Kreuzzuges* (repr. Aalen, 1968), pp. 43–6.

⁸² See esp. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 115, 163, 180.

⁸³ See esp. the *Gesta obsidionis Damiatiae*, 115, in *Quinti belli sacri scriptores minores*.

⁸⁴ It is worth emphasising here that *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 927, is a forgery, as Mayer has demonstrated in *UKJ*, III, app. †II/14.

⁸⁵ John of Tolve, *De domino Iohanne rege Ierusalem*, 138.

⁸⁶ See esp. *ibid.*, 139; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 163. In light of the above dispute, Ernoul–Bernard states that, soon after the crusade, John got the pope and emperor to

In the crusade leaders' official report to the pope of 11 November, no mention is made of *any* recent discord or disputes. Instead, the leaders presented 'a united front, dedicated to the successful conclusion of the crusade'.⁸⁷ They anxiously stressed their urgent need for reinforcements and money. They urged the pope to compel tardy crusaders, capable of fighting, to come out to Egypt as soon as possible. Indeed, the leaders explicitly asked Honorius to ensure that the greatest of these crusaders, Frederick II, personally fulfilled his vow without delay.⁸⁸ It was plain what the leaders really wanted. They wanted the emperor-elect out in Egypt, as soon as was feasible, to lead the crusade to victory.

Just a day later, though, a group consisting chiefly of northern French barons sent their own follow-up letter to Pope Honorius. The leading figures in this group – Simon of Joinville, seneschal of Champagne, and Erard of Chacenay – were kinsmen of John's. In fact, both had recently fought on Erard of Brienne's side in the Champenois civil war, but neither seems to have held a grudge against John for not doing more to help them in that venture. Simon of Joinville and Erard of Chacenay were quite important enough that they had also been part of the main circle of leaders who had written to the pope only the day beforehand. The new letter – the 'French barons' letter', as we may call it for shorthand – effectively endorsed that previous one. But it also contained a crucial coda.⁸⁹ The French barons expressly sought to commend King John to the pope, asking Honorius to be especially attentive to him and his needs.⁹⁰

This is the context for the important discovery that has already been mentioned: an effectively 'new' letter from John to Frederick II, apparently written on the same day (12 November 1219).⁹¹ Quite remarkably, the letter survives in two different versions, which we may name after where they have come from: 'Paris' (printed below, in Appendix 2) and

agree that, in future, all crusade conquests – by implication, meaning in the East – should belong to the king of Jerusalem (449). Whatever the truth on this particular point, in practice the significant 'constitutional' issues surrounding the disposition of captured territory could not be so easily resolved. The problem of the status of Damietta, in particular, was resurrected some twenty years later when crusaders *next* captured the city, under the command of the French king, Louis IX. For this, see *The Seventh Crusade, 1244–1254: Sources and Documents*, comp. and tr. P. Jackson (Aldershot, 2007), 70–1.

⁸⁷ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 164. However, it is acknowledged in this letter that many crusaders intended to depart 'in instanti passagio' (Röhrich, *Studien zur Geschichte des fünften Kreuzzuges*, 45).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 43–6.

⁸⁹ Remarkably, the coda has, on occasion, been omitted (Röhrich, *Studien zur Geschichte des fünften Kreuzzuges*, 47).

⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 47–8; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 164, 171–2.

⁹¹ See, too, my article in the forthcoming volume on the Fifth Crusade, 'From King John of Jerusalem to the emperor-elect Frederick II: a neglected letter from the Fifth Crusade'.

‘Innsbruck’ (which will shortly be published, as part of the *MGH* series, by Professor Josef Riedmann). Both versions are clearly the same letter for the first 270 words or so, up to the point at which John has just mentioned the capture of Damietta. However, after this point the Paris text quickly comes to a formal close. By contrast, ‘Innsbruck’ branches out into its own concluding section – longer, in fact, than the rest of the letter put together – in which it describes the capture of Damietta in much more detail.⁹²

We might well be inclined to accept Innsbruck, long ending and all, as the better basic recension of the letter. Innsbruck is, after all, a medieval transcript, dating from around 1260, whereas the Paris text is much younger (clearly, it is an early modern hand). But this line of reasoning leads us to quite the wrong conclusion. It seems that Innsbruck’s long ending is an interpolation, added by someone else later, to describe the capture of Damietta in much more detail than John himself ever did in the original letter. There is telling evidence to support this idea. The text that Paris and Innsbruck have in common is full of terms such as ‘we’ and ‘us’, to refer to John and the crusaders, and ‘you’, to denote Frederick II. But such personal pronouns suddenly drop out of the letter, and can scarcely be found at all in the long final section of Innsbruck (that is, the interpolation). Indeed, by the end of that section, it has to be said, John and Frederick are referred to not as ‘we’ and ‘you’ but in the third person (‘a rege Ier[oso]l[i]m[itano]...ad adventum regis F[rederici]...’). It is worth adding that Innsbruck does not finish the letter properly, with a dating clause, whereas Paris does.⁹³ For these reasons, above all, it is clear that Paris is the better basic text of the letter, for all its faults, and that, essentially, it should be preferred to Innsbruck.

The Paris text, printed in Appendix 2, below, is taken from the BnF, MS Lat. 11900, fol. 129. Lat. 11900 is volume fifteen of a series labelled ‘Anecdota’. This particular volume reached its final form, it seems, as late as 1896. It consists of early-modern transcripts of thirteenth-century documents, basically arranged in chronological order. The majority

⁹² There are quite a number of scholars who deserve my thanks at this point. Dr Marcello Pacifico made the crucial link, spotting the similarities between my ‘Paris’ text and Riedmann’s ‘Innsbruck’ version. Professor Riedmann has very kindly shared not only his expertise on the subject but also his unpublished transcription of the Innsbruck text. I have drawn heavily on his work both here and below. Above all, though, I would like to record my thanks to Professor Nicholas Vincent, who first alerted me to the very existence of the letter. I am tremendously grateful to him for drawing it to my attention, as well as for all his generous help in so many other ways.

⁹³ The observations in this paragraph are based on a close comparison between my ‘Paris’ text (see below, Appendix 2) and Riedmann’s unpublished transcription of the ‘Innsbruck’ version.

concern northern French affairs, mostly the doings and dealings of high-level aristocrats. A truly fascinating tome, Lat. 11900 could well contain several other highly significant texts that have not yet come to widespread scholarly attention.

Let us turn now to the content of the Paris recension. Disregarding the Innsbruck interpolation, this is the only known text of a letter exchanged between John and Frederick, although we know that they were much in touch with one another later.⁹⁴ In truth, the letter reads as though John is establishing a correspondence, rather than continuing one. He skilfully seeks to set up a relationship, almost of equals, with the emperor-elect: he offers Frederick 'greetings in Him who gives salvation to kings'. John presents himself as the crusade's sole leader, making no mention of anyone else. He emphasises just how much he and his kingdom have suffered to bring about the liberation of the Holy Land, but he adds firmly that he trusts 'in divine help and yours'. John looks back at the crusade's grand strategy ever since the start of the Egyptian campaign eighteen months earlier, and justifies it. As we shall see shortly, he is able to say, with justice, that this grand strategy is working.⁹⁵ John then describes al-Kamil's proposed peace terms in detail – though, as already noted, he carefully says nothing about having been personally in favour of them, or about having been overruled. The letter culminates in a terse account of the greatest triumph of the crusade so far, the capture of Damietta (and this is where the Innsbruck version takes off into interpolation). In short, the Ayyubids are shown to be in serious straits, losing their grip in Egypt and the Holy Land simultaneously. All Frederick has to do is fulfil his vow in person, or send a sizeable host out to the East, in sufficient time. Victory will surely follow.⁹⁶

If there is one point that stands out about this letter, then it is this: it is extremely intimately connected with the French barons' letter. This may come across most plainly from how closely they replicate each other's language when describing al-Kamil's peace offer.⁹⁷ From the dating clauses, it would seem that the two letters were written on the same day, by political allies. They could well have been composed more or less concurrently. All this helps to confirm that, taken together, the two letters represent a conscious 'act of policy' by John and a particular group of his supporters. Yet it is still worth underlining here that we can know only a certain amount about this act of policy, since it existed within a

⁹⁴ See esp. below, 124–5. ⁹⁵ Below, 113.

⁹⁶ See Appendix 2, below, for the text and a translation of the 'Paris' version.

⁹⁷ Compare John's letter, in Appendix 2, below, to the French barons' letter in Röhrich, *Studien zur Geschichte des fünften Kreuzzuges*, 46–8.

context of other possible letters, verbal communications, information and misinformation about which we now know very little. It is highly significant, for example, that John, in passing, explicitly refers to the oral, additional communication that the bearer of his letter will deliver to Frederick.⁹⁸ This is especially noteworthy in view of the obvious ‘elephant in the room’, not only in John’s letter but also in the crusade leaders’ official report and the French barons’ letter. None of them speaks openly about the dissensions and splits that were clearly still racking the crusader host.

It is these that really explain this act of policy. To remind ourselves of the precise chronology: Damietta’s future had recently been settled (though only for the time being), and the crusade’s leaders had just composed their official report for Honorius III. On the very next day some of John’s principal allies wrote their ‘follow-up’ letter to the pope, commending John’s judgement and loyalty, whilst John himself suddenly addressed the emperor-elect directly, presenting himself as the sole leader of the crusade so far, and appealing for aid and support. Both these letters should evidently be seen in the light of the recent struggle for possession of Damietta, and of the increasing likelihood that Frederick II would arrive, in the not-too-distant future, to take over the crusade.⁹⁹ In short, John’s letter should be read as an assertion of his own current lordship, not only over the crusade but also over Damietta. It was clearly becoming necessary to stress both these points to Frederick, the ‘absent commander-in-chief’, for he could well have had other ideas. When Frederick reached Egypt, he would not only naturally become the crusade’s unquestioned leader, but, it seems, it would also be for him to determine whether King John would retain Damietta.

Powell has summarised John’s political manoeuvring after the capture of Damietta as follows: ‘There can be no question but that John and his supporters realized that their problem was not so much with the legate as with his master.’¹⁰⁰ Powell himself, though, has shown that Pelagius was really serving *two* masters at this time, the pope and Frederick; and John’s ‘new’ letter confirms that this is the right way to amend Powell’s summary. John and his supporters realised that their problems were not so much with the legate and with the ‘imperialists’ within the crusader host, as with the distant twin leaders of the papal–Hohenstaufen rapprochement.

⁹⁸ The ‘Innsbruck’ interpolation might represent a later attempt to write up the kinds of things that John’s letter-bearer could have said. See Appendix 2, below.

⁹⁹ For this, see most recently Smith, ‘The role of Pope Honorius III in the Fifth Crusade’, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 171.

Accordingly, going straight over the heads of Pelagius and the imperialists, John and his allies were clearly trying to deal direct with the emperor-elect and the pope, to refashion their relationship with both on their own terms, if they possibly could.

Comparatively little material evidence has survived from the Fifth Crusade. Yet there are a quite remarkably large number of deniers, minted by the crusaders at Damietta (probably between its capture, in November 1219, and the loss of the city just under two years later).¹⁰¹ Presumably, the reason that so many of these coins were issued was that the 'international' host at Damietta stood in very great need of standardised, mutually acceptable currency. Issuing money was, of course, a distinguishing mark of formal authority, and these deniers confirm John's lordship over the city. They bear the legends **+IOhANNES REX** or **+IOhES: REX:** on one side, and **DAMIETA** or **DAMIATA** on the other. Unfortunately, Böhm leapt to the assumption that the two sides, taken together, read 'John, king of Damietta', as though the city were a kingdom in its own right.¹⁰² Metcalf has blown this *canard* out of the pond, though: the two sides should not be read together in this way.¹⁰³ What is far more interesting is the reversal of the legends on the **DAMIATA** deniers: the king's name and image appear on different sides of the coin, not together, as is much more usual (see Illustration 4). Metcalf has commented that '[this] was almost certainly significant at the time. On the contemporary deniers of Cyprus, for example, reversed legends. . . usually. . . signify a regency.'¹⁰⁴ John could, of course, be regarded as merely the crowned regent for his infant daughter. Yet he himself would not have seen it in this way, and surely the minters who issued the coins in his name were ultimately answerable to him. It is unlikely, then, that this is the meaning of the reversal. A better explanation is that the reversed deniers were struck at Damietta only after the king himself had left Egypt. In this case, the reversal signifies the *bailliage* (i.e. the regency or lieutenantship) that John left at Damietta in his absence.¹⁰⁵

It was not until some time after the lordship of Damietta had been settled (at least, for the present) that the spoils within it were formally divided up. By making good his claim to the city, John had guaranteed himself the lion's share of Damietta's wealth – a third, according to a

¹⁰¹ Metcalf has emphasised just how unlikely it is that these coins were minted during the long and gruelling siege, before the capture of the city itself. See his *Coinage of the Crusades and the Latin East in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 2nd edn (London, 1995), 81.

¹⁰² Böhm, *Johann von Brienne*, 55 n. 134.

¹⁰³ Metcalf, *Coinage of the Crusades and the Latin East*, 81. ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 111–17.



Illustration 4 A **DAMIATA** denier, displaying a reversed legend

rather later chronicler, John of Joinville.¹⁰⁶ (However, we do know that, after the capture of the city, the Teutonic Knights gave the king half *their* share of the plunder too – conceivably in recognition of the extremity of his needs.)¹⁰⁷ John may therefore have been quite prepared to agree that the rest of the division process fell within the purview of Pelagius's legatine mandate. In truth, though, Pelagius had saddled himself with a thankless task. According to the eyewitness John of Tolve, there was a spate of riots and redivisions in late December and early January. However, he may well be overstating things when he claims that, in the course of all this, the legate's very life was threatened by an Italian mob.¹⁰⁸

The Latins transformed Damietta into a suitable base, converting its main mosque into a cathedral and dividing the city up amongst

¹⁰⁶ John of Joinville, *Vie de Saint Louis*, ed. J. Monfrin (Paris, 1995), p. 83.

¹⁰⁷ John perhaps reciprocated later when he granted the Teutonic Knights the share of the booty that would fall to him as king – in this case, a half – when he was not there in person to claim it. See *UKJ*, III, DD. 638, 640; and also Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, A, 224–5.

¹⁰⁸ John of Tolve, *De domino Iohanne rege Ierusalem*, 139–40.

themselves.¹⁰⁹ They would surely have done something along these lines even if they had been intending to retain Damietta only for a comparatively short period of time. But such apparent planning for the future perhaps indicates larger, long-term ambitions. Was it hoped that, under Frederick’s leadership, the Latins would not only liberate the Holy Land but also keep this potentially enormously lucrative, as well as strategically crucial, bridgehead here on the Nile Delta? It is unfortunate that we can only begin to speculate as to where John stood on this matter. One point is clear, though. John had striven very hard to claim the lordship of Damietta, and in the process he had resoundingly reasserted his position as the crusade’s ‘chief’. Yet, fairly soon afterwards, he quit both Egypt and the main crusade altogether – in the end, for more than a year. Around Easter 1220 he headed back towards the Holy Land, along with a sizeable following.¹¹⁰ During his long absence, as we shall see, his effective leadership over the crusade dwindled alarmingly. Damietta remained formally his, though, until the expedition ended.

‘Working to relieve his kingdom’s distress’

There was, in truth, a range of reasons why John left Egypt in early 1220. But the main or ‘real’ reason is still usually seen as a selfish one that presents him in a bad light, namely his claim to the throne of Cilician Armenia. To be fair, this *is* how a number of contemporaries saw it – above all, Oliver of Paderborn. As Oliver put it, with bitter sarcasm: ‘When the year was changing, when kings usually set out to war, John, king of Jerusalem, left the camp of the faithful. . . acting contrary to an agreement which he had made at Acre when [the crusaders] were about to sail to Egypt, that he would not desert them so long as he was alive and free.’ Oliver suggested that John redoubled his bad faith by promising a speedy return that never, in fact, materialised. Oliver added that ‘[the king] pretended many reasons for excusing himself’, and perhaps this is rather more revealing than the chronicler intended. But Oliver then presented what he clearly considered to be the real reason why John stopped ‘attending to the business of Christianity’: the king’s Cilician ambitions.¹¹¹ Oliver was not the only one who was deeply critical of John’s decision to leave the

¹⁰⁹ A process briefly summarised by T. C. Van Cleve, ‘The Fifth Crusade’, in K. Setton *et al.*, eds., *A History of the Crusades*, vol. II (Philadelphia, 1955–89), 420.

¹¹⁰ Below, 114.

¹¹¹ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, chs. 43, 45; see also Colbert-Fontainebleau, 349. In *UKJ*, Mayer notes John’s promise not to abandon the crusade in Egypt as an *actum* (III, D.*636). But, just because Oliver says something, it does not necessarily mean that an *actum* to that effect once existed.

main crusader host. Laconically, but even more devastatingly, Jacques de Vitry simply noted that John ‘deserted the army’.¹¹²

It is telling, though, that the matter of the Cilician succession had been ongoing for many months by the time that John really swung into action to try to win this throne. King Leo had died as far back as May 1219, roughly three-quarters of a year before John eventually left Egypt. Leo left three plausible successors, meaning that the ‘War of the Antiochene Succession’ gave way to a Cilician one. At the last, he had named his infant daughter, Isabel, as his heir. But he had previously preferred Raymond-Roupen, the claimant to Antioch. (Raymond-Roupen had quarrelled with Leo just before the latter’s death, though, and lost Antioch to Bohemund IV. He had then been obliged to fall back on the crusader camp, at Damietta, to consult with his principal allies, the master of the Hospital and Pelagius.)¹¹³ Lastly, there was John. His wife, Stephanie, was Leo’s eldest daughter and only mature surviving child, and she and John had produced a male heir. For John, the birth of this son had reopened the possibility (now closed off in the kingdom of Jerusalem) of siring a line of Brienne kings in the East. It is worth adding a final point. Although Cilician Armenia was, in various ways, a rather poor second best to the kingdom of Jerusalem, under Leo it had been arguably the most vigorous Latin Christian polity in the Levant.

When there was a contested succession, it was usually advisable to act very speedily and forcefully. Both John and Raymond-Roupen did what they could in the months immediately following Leo’s death, but, crucially, from a distance – from Damietta. (In John’s case, this may well be a sign that the latter, and the crusade, were rather more important to him.) Over the course of this period, John and Raymond-Roupen were, no doubt, acting against each other.¹¹⁴ What is often forgotten is that this had at least the potential for further, serious splits between the king and Raymond-Roupen’s allies, the Hospital and Pelagius. Both John and Raymond-Roupen presumably sent envoys to Cilicia as soon as they heard of Leo’s death, to try to secure their own accession. But where John succeeded and Raymond-Roupen failed was in enlisting the backing of the Church: lobbying the pope to secure recognition as the rightful heir. However, it was not until February 1220 that Honorius III acknowledged John as such.¹¹⁵ By then not only had John reaffirmed his leadership over the crusade by taking

¹¹² See Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la cinquième croisade*, 164; and Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 176–7.

¹¹³ See esp. Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l’époque des croisades*, 630–1. ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 631.

¹¹⁵ Honorius III, *Regesta*, I, no. 2320.

possession of its principal conquest (at least, for the time being) but another – this time, critical – reason to leave Egypt had developed.

Of course, it is essentially an impossible task to try to draw up a list, in order, of John’s aims and priorities in late 1219–20. But preserving his ‘twin capitals’ – Acre, Tyre and their enclaves – must surely have been more or less at the head of this list (especially as opposed to what was merely an enticing prospect in Cilicia, which had yet to materialise). Until the capture of Damietta, for all that the crusade in Egypt appeared bogged down, the Latins’ situation in the Holy Land had improved dramatically. In his letter to Frederick II, already referred to, John had truthfully reported significant successes there – not despite, but because of, the crusade’s focus on Egypt. From around mid-1218 onwards the Ayyubids were at full stretch across their vast empire, *and* fearing a further great Christian offensive, this time in the Holy Land itself. They therefore pursued a rather forlorn policy of destroying their own fortifications there to prevent them falling into Latin hands. In his letter to the emperor-elect, John particularly drew attention to the dismantlement of the Ayyubids’ stronghold on Mount Tabor, and to their demolition of much of the city of Jerusalem.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the threat remained that the Ayyubids might be able to snuff out Acre and Tyre, and so deal a fatal blow to the kingdom of Jerusalem, while Latin forces were concentrated in Egypt. Despite the Ayyubids’ dismantlement policy, the kingdom remained acutely vulnerable to such attack. By the end of November 1219 – the very same month during which John had assured Frederick of how well things were going in the Holy Land – the situation there had taken a sharp turn for the worse. Al-Mu‘azzam had earlier played a critical role in stabilising his brother al-Kamil’s regime in Egypt after a potentially highly dangerous attempted coup against the latter back in the spring. After the fall of Damietta, al-Mu‘azzam swiftly returned to Syria, to strike at the comparatively unguarded kingdom of Jerusalem. He soon captured and sacked Caesarea, making a mockery of all the efforts that John and others had recently made to refortify the town. Al-Mu‘azzam had much less success, though, when he turned his army against the mighty new Templar complex of Château Pèlerin. Thereafter, his plan to move against Acre was

¹¹⁶ See Appendix 2, below. The dismantlement of the fortifications on Mount Tabor represented a particularly noteworthy triumph for the Latins. Not only had these fortifications been the immediate *casus belli* for the Fifth Crusade, they had also been a genuine threat to the rump kingdom of Jerusalem. The destruction of much of the Holy City was potentially beneficial to the Christians, too, since it made the city a lot easier to capture, though not to hold. However, it was also an appalling sacrilege.

compromised by rival Muslim manoeuvring, including the activities of another Ayyubid brother, al-Ashraf, in the north.¹¹⁷

In fact, the evidence points to the idea that John was urgently summoned, in early 1220, to defend the rump kingdom of Jerusalem. With al-Mu‘azzam on the rampage, the situation there could well have appeared increasingly desperate to the *bailli*, Garnier the German, whom John had left behind at Acre in command of a skeleton force. By March 1220 Garnier had left the Holy Land altogether, hastening to John at Damietta.¹¹⁸ It thus seems that Garnier had decided to appeal in person to the king and the other Latin Eastern leaders in Egypt, to come back at once to safeguard what was left of the kingdom. The threat posed by al-Mu‘azzam is undoubtedly the best explanation as to why so many Latin Easterners went back with John, or not long after him. The returnees included not just almost all of John’s ‘inner circle’ and the knights of the kingdom of Jerusalem but also the majority of the Templars, headed by their new master.¹¹⁹

Syria was also, of course, a much better base than Egypt for John to pursue his Cilician Armenian ambitions from. It is clear that he sought to do so in the immediate aftermath of his journey back from Damietta. But, at this critical juncture, both Stephanie and his young son died, and with them perished John’s hopes of the Cilician crown.¹²⁰ As soon as he heard the news, Honorius III promptly switched his support to Raymond-Roupen. Nonetheless, the pope remained gravely concerned, rightly or wrongly, that John still intended war against the Cilician Armenians, to press his (now defunct) claim. In August 1220 Honorius wrote forcefully to John. Although the pope himself was unsure precisely why John had left Damietta, he approved if John had done so to protect the kingdom of Jerusalem. But Honorius insisted that John must not get sidetracked from the crusade, and he specifically mentioned rumours of impending war between the king and Cilician Armenia. The pope was quite unmovable

¹¹⁷ See the summary by Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 150, 176; but also see the much more detailed treatment by Gottschalk, *Al-Malik al-Kamil von Egypten*, esp. 76–91.

¹¹⁸ *UK*, III, D. 638.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 639–40; *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 933; Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la cinquième croisade*, 164–6; Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 53.

¹²⁰ See esp. *ibid.*, ch. 45; and Colbert-Fontainebleau, 349. Ernoul–Bernard interjects here one of its most bizarre anecdotes. It explains that John heard, at around this time, that Stephanie intended to poison his daughter by his first marriage, Isabella, ‘through whom he held the kingdom [of Jerusalem]’. John was so aghast at hearing this that he beat his queen so hard that some said she had died from it (Ernoul–Bernard, 427). It is surely right to follow Böhm in dismissing this hair-raising tale (*Johann von Brienne*, 58 n. 143). But Böhm did not fully appreciate that there is a kind of ‘wife-beating *topos*’ running through Ernoul–Bernard’s account of John and his family (see also Ernoul–Bernard, 453; and below, 135–6, 141).

on this issue, and he made it explicit with an open threat of excommunication, should John attack the Armenians or any other Christians.¹²¹

Whenever John finally accepted it, the collapse of his Cilician ambitions did leave him freer to focus on al-Mu‘azzam. It seems that the king could not prevent a second serious assault on Château Pèlerin, in the course of which al-Mu‘azzam razed the nearby Templar tower of Destroit. Oliver of Paderborn described, at some length, the help that came, or was called for, from across the Latin East to aid the Templars in their defence of the Château. Noticeably, though, he said nothing whatsoever about John’s involvement in any of this.¹²² Back in the 1950s Runciman suggested that the king was ‘[keeping] his army in the offing’, ready to intervene in the right way at the crucial moment.¹²³ But perhaps Oliver deliberately glossed over John’s activities against the sultan at this time – because the chronicler did not want to admit that the king achieved important things for the Christian cause through being absent from the main body of the crusade at Damietta. Whatever the truth on this particular point, al-Mu‘azzam and his army were soon obliged to withdraw.¹²⁴

A full six months after al-Mu‘azzam ended his offensive against the rump kingdom, John was still at Acre. It is worth asking why he had remained there. The most obvious reason is that he was afraid that al-Mu‘azzam would soon return, and was determined to be on hand to blunt any new assaults. But perhaps, too, the situation in the Holy Land was now so dire that John felt that it was impossible to leave it again in the near future. A letter composed at around this time may lend some support to this view. On 1 October 1220 the archbishops of Caesarea and Nazareth, the bishop of Bethlehem and a number of Jerusalemite abbots addressed a plaintive appeal for aid to the French king, Philip Augustus. These clerics admitted that John was no longer at Damietta with the crusader host, but they explained this away, emphasising the theme that concerned them the most. Poverty, they said, was the chief reason why the king, ‘compelled by necessity’, had had to leave Egypt and return to Acre. (We might perhaps adapt this, to say that John’s parlous financial position could well have been a good part of the explanation why he had to stay in the Holy Land for so long.) The clerics filled out their picture in apocalyptic tones. Only Acre and Tyre were still possessed by the Christians, and these were often under attack. The land was poor and devastated, and ‘the king alone is working to relieve’ some particular forms of distress. The clerics hammered home their

¹²¹ Honorius III, *Regesta*, I, no. 2610; Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 180–1.

¹²² Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, chs. 52–3.

¹²³ Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 165.

¹²⁴ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 53.

point by adding – surely correctly – that, having pledged so much of his income to his creditors, John was now finding it extremely difficult to arrange fresh loans.¹²⁵

Although it is not easy for us to discern what was really going on, the ‘mid-crusade’ period at Acre did witness a milestone in John’s life: the end of his fifteen-year period as count of Brienne. Walter IV was approaching his majority, and it is possible that the first sign of this comes in an *actum*, issued in John’s presence in March 1220. Amongst the witnesses, we find a new and rather mysterious pair: a certain ‘Henricus de Brenne’ and his brother, Albert. Might these be Walter’s knights, newly come out to the East to conduct preliminary negotiations? But no matter. A year or so later, John wrote to Countess Blanche and Theobald IV, formally asking them to allow Walter to take possession of his inheritance, even though he was still under-age.¹²⁶ Just a month after this it would seem that Walter himself arrived in the East, presumably to see John. Oliver of Paderborn recorded that a ‘Count Guy of Brienne’ landed at Damietta, part of the host headed by Frederick II’s representative, Duke Louis of Bavaria. It has tended to be thought that this was Walter.¹²⁷ John was not at Damietta at the time, but he surely met Walter when he returned there, a couple of months later.

What little we know suggests that there was a fairly amicable ‘hand-over’ from uncle to nephew. Not long afterwards, John seems to have decided that the smattering of lands that he himself still held in the West of the count of Champagne – that is, the fiefs of Onjon and Luyères – would best be safeguarded if they were held, for the present, by Walter. Shortly before he himself returned to the West, John wrote again to Blanche and Theobald, informing them that he had granted Onjon and Luyères to Walter, and asking them to accept the latter’s homage for the lordships.¹²⁸

The last advance

During John’s long absence from Damietta, Pelagius had become, *faute de mieux*, the crusade’s principal figure ‘on the spot’. He had repeatedly urged an advance, but the expedition’s secular leaders would not agree to this. Oliver of Paderborn commented that ‘[they] pretended this reason above all: that the king of Jerusalem was away by his own voluntary choice, and no other prince was present whom the people of different nations

¹²⁵ *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 937. ¹²⁶ ‘Catalogue’, no. 148.

¹²⁷ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 54 – even though Walter did not actually take the full comital title for some years thereafter (see ‘Catalogue’, nos. 151–5).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 149.

were willing to obey to lead out the people of God.’¹²⁹ This reads like a backhanded acknowledgement of the role that John had played in the crusade. The leaders clearly wanted a great lord to be present in command before committing themselves to the advance. Such individuals did start to arrive, though. Ever higher-ranking aristocrats from Frederick II’s circle came out to Damietta in 1220–21, as the newly crowned emperor moved to take control of the crusade. This strengthened, not weakened, Pelagius’s hand. As Powell has noted, the arrival of an imperial duke, Louis of Bavaria, ‘overrode the obstacle previously posed by the absence of King John.’¹³⁰ In this way, an effective joint headship over the crusade was established by the representatives of both pope and emperor, squeezing John out.

John was summoned back to Damietta to take part in the advance primarily agreed upon by Pelagius and Louis. This confirms that, at Acre, John was still in touch with the crusade and its strategy, even though he was no longer really directing either. Ernoul–Bernard depicts the king as a ‘reluctant returnee’, coming back full of doubts and gloom, but unwilling to be accused of cowardice or of abandoning the cause.¹³¹ But this is surely overdone, stretching what little evidence we have too far. Would John really have come back to jeopardise himself and his precious manpower in the advance if he was already certain it was doomed? The chances are that he went back to reassert his leadership over the crusade and over Damietta, but also to claim any new conquests resulting from the advance – all, we may guess, to strengthen his hand before the emperor’s arrival.

Once he was back in Damietta, though, John seems to have been in favour of accepting al-Kamil’s most recent set of peace proposals – his ‘second round’. Whatever the reasons for this possible change of tack, once again John got nowhere with this, as before. Perhaps he was overruled more easily than the first time around.¹³² Maybe it was only now that his famous despondency really set in. The ease with which his views had been rejected emphatically proved that he was no longer in control of the crusade, and swept aside what he could well have seen as its best – or, perhaps, as its only – hope.

In the immediate aftermath of the crusade’s collapse, John probably sought to broadcast far and wide that, although he had helped to lead the expedition’s ‘last advance’, he personally had been consistently opposed to it. There is a telling irony in the fact that circumstances now obliged

¹²⁹ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 43.

¹³⁰ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 184. ¹³¹ Ernoul–Bernard, 442–3.

¹³² See esp. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 186–7; and above, 97.

him to *downplay* his leadership role. The king's post-crusade 'line' was plainly calculated propaganda, part of a storm of recriminations, excuses and spin that swept across the Latin world straight after the crusade's disastrous end.¹³³ John could easily be made to appear as the person primarily responsible for the debacle, both as (still) the crusade's formal 'chief', and also as the most conspicuous of the commanders who had led the last, fatal advance. Although the king's retort against this viewpoint was propaganda, it was easy to sell – and swallow – primarily because it was largely true. We do not just have to take the word of John's partisans for this. Immediately after the event, at least one Western crusader, with no obvious axe to grind, wrote home that the last advance had taken place 'contra voluntatem regis Hierusalem'.¹³⁴ Even an Egyptian source, the Coptic *History of the Patriarchs*, corroborates the notion that John became more and more pessimistic as the march south continued, frequently urging a withdrawal, or at least a halt. It provides a series of picturesque vignettes, too. These include the fanatical Pelagius repeatedly accusing John of treason to the cause; and elements in the army taking such umbrage at John's 'sensible defeatism' that they threatened his very life.¹³⁵ Yet it is worth adding the caveat that this part of the Coptic *History* may possibly stem, in origin, right from the horse's mouth – from King John himself. Maybe it is based on what he and his principal allies told their Ayyubid captors during their brief period as hostages at the very end of the expedition.

Cruelly, John's leadership of the crusade was reaffirmed even as the enterprise itself foundered. Once the crusader advance had become trapped on the flooded Nile Delta, it was for John – as the crusade's chief – to lead the now unavoidable negotiations with the Ayyubids.¹³⁶ Because the Latins still possessed some crucial bargaining chips, the terms agreed were remarkably generous to them. Oliver of Paderborn described the deal in almost glowing terms.¹³⁷ But not all the crusaders were as happy with it as the chronicler made out. When news of the peace terms was brought to Damietta, a disaffected mob went on the rampage, ransacking, amongst

¹³³ Briefly summarised by Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 195–6.

¹³⁴ Philip of Aubigny's letter to Earl Ranulf of Chester and Lincoln, which can be found in Roger of Wendover, *Liber qui dicitur Flores historiarum*, ed. H. G. Hewlett, 3 vols. (London, 1886–9), II, 262–3.

¹³⁵ Powell may well be wrong in taking the latter statement at face value (*Anatomy of a Crusade*, 188). For the relevant parts of the Coptic *History*, see *Revue de l'Orient latin* 11 (1907), 259–60.

¹³⁶ Pro-John sources seize their opportunity, here, to show John's remarkable success at clearing up the mess that Pelagius, above all, was responsible for. See Colbert-Fontainebleau, 351; and Ernoul-Bernard, 444–7.

¹³⁷ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 80; Tyerman, *God's War*, 647.

other places, King John's residence there.¹³⁸ As is well known, the terms centred on a truce for eight years, not to be binding on Frederick II when he appeared in person, in return for the immediate cession of Damietta and the evacuation of Egypt.¹³⁹ Single-mindedly focused, as ever, on getting the latter carried out as soon as possible, al-Kamil did provide the famished crusader field army with food. But, as befitted the victor, he was in a position to demand, and receive, the very highest rank of the crusaders as surety hostages. King John, Pelagius, Duke Louis and the masters of the three main military orders were all obliged to undergo a short period of honourable captivity. When it ended, they embarked for Acre.¹⁴⁰ The Fifth Crusade was over.

During the expedition, King John had taken an unprecedented decision. He had resolved to raise his appeals to the West onto a new level by going back there in person. By the end of the crusade it was clear that John's dealings in the West would chiefly be with the pope and the emperor, and that the latter's expedition would now be the next great crusade. But John's plans seem to have aimed at rather more than this. At the very end of the Fifth Crusade the eminent English crusader Philip of Aubigny wrote to his compatriot, Earl Ranulf of Chester and Lincoln (who had himself earlier fought at Damietta). Philip concluded his letter as follows:

I have also to tell you that the lord king of Jerusalem is about to come to your part of the world. Therefore, I beg you to provide him with assistance in accordance with promises made to him and to other magnates, for his debts are so great that it is truly a wonder to describe them. Farewell.¹⁴¹

Clearly, by the end of the crusade, John had decided on going to England, and had met with assurances of welcome, and especially of financial aid, from English crusaders. It is surely obvious that England would be just one of many stopping points in a panoramic 'crusade tour' of the Latin West.

¹³⁸ *Chronico S. Martini Turonense*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 26, 469.

¹³⁹ See esp. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 190.

¹⁴⁰ Ernoul-Bernard not only has John propose a personal combat with the sultan, it also makes sure that the king receives the credit for getting the food arranged, by means of a histrionic outburst before al-Kamil (444, 446–7). See also Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 79.

¹⁴¹ This letter can be found in Roger of Wendover, *Flores historiarum*, II, 262–3. Gavigan gives a quite different, surely untenable translation of the second sentence, describing John's 'merits' rather than his debts. See *Christian Society and the Crusades, 1198–1229: Sources in Translation, including The Capture of Damietta by Oliver of Paderborn*, ed. E. Peters (Philadelphia, 1971), 143.

One particular reason for John to go west was ‘to seek a *baron* for his daughter, who could govern and maintain the land [of Jerusalem]’.¹⁴² Isabella was only nine or ten, but her father’s trip to the West presented an obvious, unmissable opportunity for him to arrange her marriage. Plainly, what was being looked for, once again, was a powerful figure who could mobilise large-scale Western support for the beleaguered kingdom of Jerusalem. Whilst John was surely keen to find such a ‘baron’, his own subsequent behaviour would seem to confirm that he nevertheless continued to regard himself as entitled to rule as king of Jerusalem for life.¹⁴³ In John’s view, then, whoever married Isabella could well have to reconcile himself to quite a long wait before succeeding his father-in-law on the throne.

Although John’s plans thus appear settled even before the crusade had come to an end, in the event he did not leave his kingdom until autumn 1222, almost a full year after the crusade had ended. It is well worth considering what explains the time lag. It is evident that John could not leave his kingdom until he was certain that both it, and his own position within it, were sufficiently secure. It is therefore quite believable that his departure was put on hold by an outburst of large-scale civic strife at Acre.

Trouble between the Genoese and the Pisans in the kingdom of Jerusalem was, of course, nothing new. We have already noted a previous example from John’s reign, in about 1212. However, the violence of 1222 was particularly serious. The only narrative account we have is, unfortunately, in the very partisan Genoese *Marchisii scribae annales*. The scribe claims that the Pisans burned a substantial part of the city of Acre, and destroyed a particularly fine and tall Genoese tower – yet he also says that it was they, the Pisans, who had John’s support.¹⁴⁴ It is not clear why the king backed the Pisans rather than the Genoese. But the scribe does link John’s role in the conflict to the process by which the Genoese came to build up a new base for themselves in the Levant: Beirut, the chief town of the king’s opponent, John of Ibelin.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most revealing point about the 1222 conflict is how little a role the crown seems to have played in resolving it. This is something that comes across most clearly if we look at the surviving *acta*. In these texts, it is the Church – and, especially, the much-maligned legate Pelagius – that presides over, and kick-starts, the peace-making process. We might suggest that Pelagius and the rest of

¹⁴² Ernoul–Bernard, 449. ¹⁴³ See esp. below, 135–46.

¹⁴⁴ *Marchisii scribae annales*, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 18, 150.

¹⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, 150; and also M.-L. Favreau-Lilie, ‘Friedenssicherung und Konfliktbegrenzung: Genua, Pisa und Venedig in Accon, ca. 1220–1224’, in G. Airaldi and B. Kedar, eds., *I comuni italiani nel regno crociato di Gerusalemme* (Genoa, 1986), 429–47.

those involved were broadly following the same cleric-led procedure for making peace between the two sides that had worked earlier in John's reign.¹⁴⁶ But this time, owing to the completely different, much larger scale of the conflict, the effect was to make the monarchy appear rather sidelined.¹⁴⁷ Whatever the truth on this point, the Genoese–Pisan struggle may well reveal something of the tensions, strains and disappointments that the crusade had engendered within the kingdom of Jerusalem as a whole.¹⁴⁸

The pope and the emperor may first have heard concrete information about John's plans to come west from Hermann of Salza, master of the Teutonic Order (the first leading Latin Eastern figure to return to the West in the immediate aftermath of the Fifth Crusade).¹⁴⁹ After a short but unpleasant hail of mutual recriminations concerning the crusade's disastrous end, Honorius and Frederick met, and decided to hold a further, much more comprehensive conference – to include Latin Eastern leaders – at Verona in November 1222. On 25 April the pope wrote to Pelagius and John, summoning them to attend.¹⁵⁰ In the event, they were accompanied by the patriarch, Ralph of Merencourt, by the master of the Hospital, Garin of Montaigu, and by a proxy representing the Templars. Frederick had promptly dispatched a flotilla to bring them all to his lands in Italy, so underlining the status that he had grown into, as the Holy Land's paramount secular protector.¹⁵¹ For his part, shortly before sailing, John appointed Odo of Montbéliard as *bailli*, to remain 'in [the king's] place'.¹⁵²

In the end, the Latin Eastern party did not arrive on time for the Verona conference to go ahead as planned. It had to be rescheduled for Ferentino, near Anagni, in March 1223. What was agreed there would prove fateful not only for John but also for the future of the Latin East as a whole.

¹⁴⁶ See esp. *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 858, and also nos. 848–9.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., nos. 955–6, 958, 960–1.

¹⁴⁸ For a further sign of the king's difficulties by this time, we could also note Honorius III, *Regesta*, II, no. 3826.

¹⁴⁹ See Colbert–Fontainebleau, 352, 355; see also W. Cohn, *Hermann von Salza* (Breslau, 1930), 35–6.

¹⁵⁰ Honorius III, *Regesta*, II, no. 3931.

¹⁵¹ See esp. Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, ch. 89; and Colbert–Fontainebleau, 355.

¹⁵² Colbert–Fontainebleau, 355.

4 A decade in the West

Arguably, the most fascinating part of John's story is how he lost the kingdom of Jerusalem to his new son-in-law, Frederick II, ending up, instead, as Latin emperor of Constantinople. These events form the basic outline of what proved to be John's 'decade in the West', from 1222 to 1231 – a period neatly dissected by the critical dividing line of November 1225, when Frederick suddenly turned on him, effectively ousting him from the crown of Jerusalem.

John spent most of the 'decade' in Italy, although northeastern France also continued to figure prominently in his affairs, as before. But John's career at this time – in particular, in the first half of the decade – was quite remarkably wide-ranging. In the following pages we look, by turns, at his activities in the Iberian peninsula, England, parts of Germany, the Bosphorus and Constantinople, and of course the Holy Land. The decade opened, as we have seen, with John as the first king of Jerusalem to go to the West in person. How he was received and treated reveals a great deal – above all, perhaps, about the roles available there to such a king (or later, effectively, ex-king). Once he had lost his realm in the Holy Land, John became a potentially rather attractive figure who could conceivably be 'hired in' by other Latin polities or institutions in need of a ruler, commander or figurehead. This, in the end, was how he became Latin emperor, a post for which he appeared uniquely well qualified. Indeed, it has been suggested that, even *before* he lost the kingdom of Jerusalem, John was already being seriously considered for alternative royal prospects in the West. It is in this chapter, then, that we can most clearly see John as a kind of 'crown man'.¹ But this, perhaps the most fascinating aspect of his life and career, easily lends itself to egregious distortion – which, in turn, can lead to highly faulty, even caricatured, views of him.

If we had to pick out a single reason for taking an interest in this phase of John's career, then it would be as follows. Frederick II's shabby treatment

¹ For this phrase, see above, 4.

of him, in November 1225, created an additional and significant ‘running sore’ in papal–Hohenstaufen relations. This aspect of the way that those relations further deteriorated in 1226–7, leading to their sudden, complete collapse in 1227–30, has never yet been properly explored. In sum, there is a unity to this ‘decade’ of John’s life, going beyond the obvious fact that he spent it in the West between his two reigns in the East. In so far as John was concerned, this decade consisted largely of reactions and responses to Frederick II, John’s most important patron, ally and projected successor in 1223–5, and thereafter his most formidable opponent down to 1231.

The wide range of John’s life and experiences in this decade is reflected in the variety of sources employed to trace it, drawn from a multiplicity of different provenances. It is worth underlining, once again, the challenge of maintaining control over such a broad evidence base, and of utilising it sensitively. The number of *acta* issued by, or closely involving, John himself does seem to go down rather sharply in this period. This is not surprising, though, since he was no longer count of Brienne, or king of Jerusalem either in his kingdom (1222–5), or later, effectively, at all. But this does not mean that our *acta* for John dry up completely – yet. Attention should be drawn here to various ‘new’ discoveries, which show John acting as a prestigious mediator, mainly between his aristocratic close kinsmen in northeastern France.² This helps give a more rounded picture of the peace-making role that John rather made his own, when looking to garner support for himself and his realm in the East (that is, the kingdom of Jerusalem from 1222 to 1225, and the Latin empire of Constantinople from 1229 to 1231).³

‘Trusting in divine help, and the emperor’s’

The most significant agreement that emerged out of the great conference held at Ferentino in March 1223 was that, in due course, Frederick II himself would marry John’s daughter, Isabella.⁴ It is most likely that the papacy was pressing for this marriage, as a way of tying Frederick firmly to the recovery of the Holy Land. John’s aims, at this juncture, were presumably twofold: to secure not just the future of his kingdom but, more particularly, his own position and that of his daughter within it. It could certainly be argued that there was no better way to do this than through a marriage alliance with the emperor. The immediate future of the Holy Land was already largely in Frederick’s hands, since his was the next

² See Appendix 1, nos. 8, 11. ³ Below, 125, 128–9, 132, 153.

⁴ Soon afterwards, on 5 August, the pope promulgated a dispensation to permit the marriage, since the couple were too closely related (Honorius III, *Regesta*, II, no. 4460).

expected great crusade. To marry Isabella to him was simply to proceed rather further down this same path. Provided that Frederick genuinely respected John's right to retain his crown and rule for life, all would be well. It therefore seems correct to accept the essence of Colbert-Fontainebleau's statement that 'Hermann, the master of the [Teutonic Knights]...who had worked hard to arrange the marriage...agreed with [King John] that the emperor would leave him the kingdom of Jerusalem all of his life'.⁵ Such an undertaking would surely not have been left informal, though. We may guess that a marriage contract was issued by John, as the Jerusalemite regency government had done when he himself had married Maria – in which case the terms were set down in writing. We can also assume that John had to secure the assent of the barons of the kingdom of Jerusalem, communicating back to them in the Holy Land. Moreover, all of the above took place under papal auspices. Certainly, in the event, when Frederick simply reneged on his part of the deal, Pope Honorius was aghast, and flatly refused to accept it.

John had witnessed one of Frederick's *acta* even before the Ferentino conference. He would do so again, at least four more times, over the course of the coming few years.⁶ Yet at first, it seems, he did not intend to stay in the West for so long. His plans changed, though. There are perhaps hints in our sources that the emperor expected John to return to his own kingdom quite soon after Ferentino.⁷ Clearer evidence comes in a letter that Frederick wrote to the pope a year after the conference, in March 1224. In it, Frederick confirmed that John had had little in the way of successes ('few or none') in recruiting for the crusade in the places that he had visited so far; and it appears that John had now decided that the time had come to go back to the Holy Land. Frederick pointedly claimed the credit for having persuaded John to remain in the West still longer. (The clear implication, for papal benefit, is that the launching of Frederick's crusade was now so imminent that it was best for John to stay in the West, and then return to his kingdom along with the expedition.)⁸ Whatever arguments persuaded him, the decision to remain in the West in 1223–5 eventually cost John dear – and maybe even cost him his throne. It would have been much harder for Frederick effectively to depose him, in

⁵ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 358.

⁶ *Regesta Imperii*, vol. V, *Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter Philipp, Otto IV, Friedrich II, Heinrich (VII), Conrad IV, Heinrich Raspe, Wilhelm und Richard, 1198–1272*, comp. J. F. Böhmer, J. Ficker and E. Winkelmann (Innsbruck, 1881–1901), part 1, nos. 1440, 1468, 1571–2, 1574, 1576.

⁷ See *ibid.*, no. 1485; and Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, ed. C. Garufi, in *RISS2*, VII, part 2 (Bologna, 1936–8), 108–9.

⁸ *Regesta Imperii*, V, part 1, no. 1516.

November 1225, if John had then been the ‘sitting tenant’ in his own kingdom. This is a theme that we will return to.⁹

After Ferentino, John began his long-intended crusade ‘tour’ of the West. This is best considered more thematically than chronologically, but Map 3 gives the (missing) requisite sense of the order in which the tour progressed.

Let us begin with the ‘imperial dimension’: John, Frederick II and his territories, right down to the critical dividing line of November 1225. In the late summer of 1224 John paid a brief visit to the Rhineland. Having passed through Metz, he was met by Frederick’s son and heir, the young king of the Romans, Henry (VII). John went with him to Cologne, where both were welcomed by Henry’s guardian, the German regent and future saint, Archbishop Engelbert.¹⁰ John returned to Italy later that year, now with his new queen, Berengaria of (León-)Castile, whom he had married in Spain.¹¹ He and Berengaria were well received in Bologna, despite that city’s burgeoning hostility to their chief patron and ally, Frederick II. This hostility was a factor that would later serve John well, as we shall see.¹² It would seem that, just after they had crossed into the kingdom of Sicily, Berengaria gave birth to the couple’s first child – a daughter (Mary?).¹³ It was now becoming increasingly clear that Frederick would not be able to depart on crusade according to the timetable agreed at Ferentino. In the event, it was King John and the patriarch of Jerusalem who broached with Pope Honorius the now delicate subject of another postponement. Here, as elsewhere, we can see John playing a politically useful role as a highly prestigious mediator, who was both insider and outsider. The upshot was the famous San Germano conference of July 1225, at which Frederick swore on the Gospels to depart on crusade by 15 August 1227. The emperor also promised suitable sureties, including more than 100,000 ounces of gold (or equivalent), to be paid in five instalments to various figures, amongst them John. But it looks as if John never got his hands on very much – or perhaps any – of it.¹⁴ Frederick sealed his commitment by securing John’s permission to marry Isabella straight away. She was then

⁹ Below, 138, 140, 145.

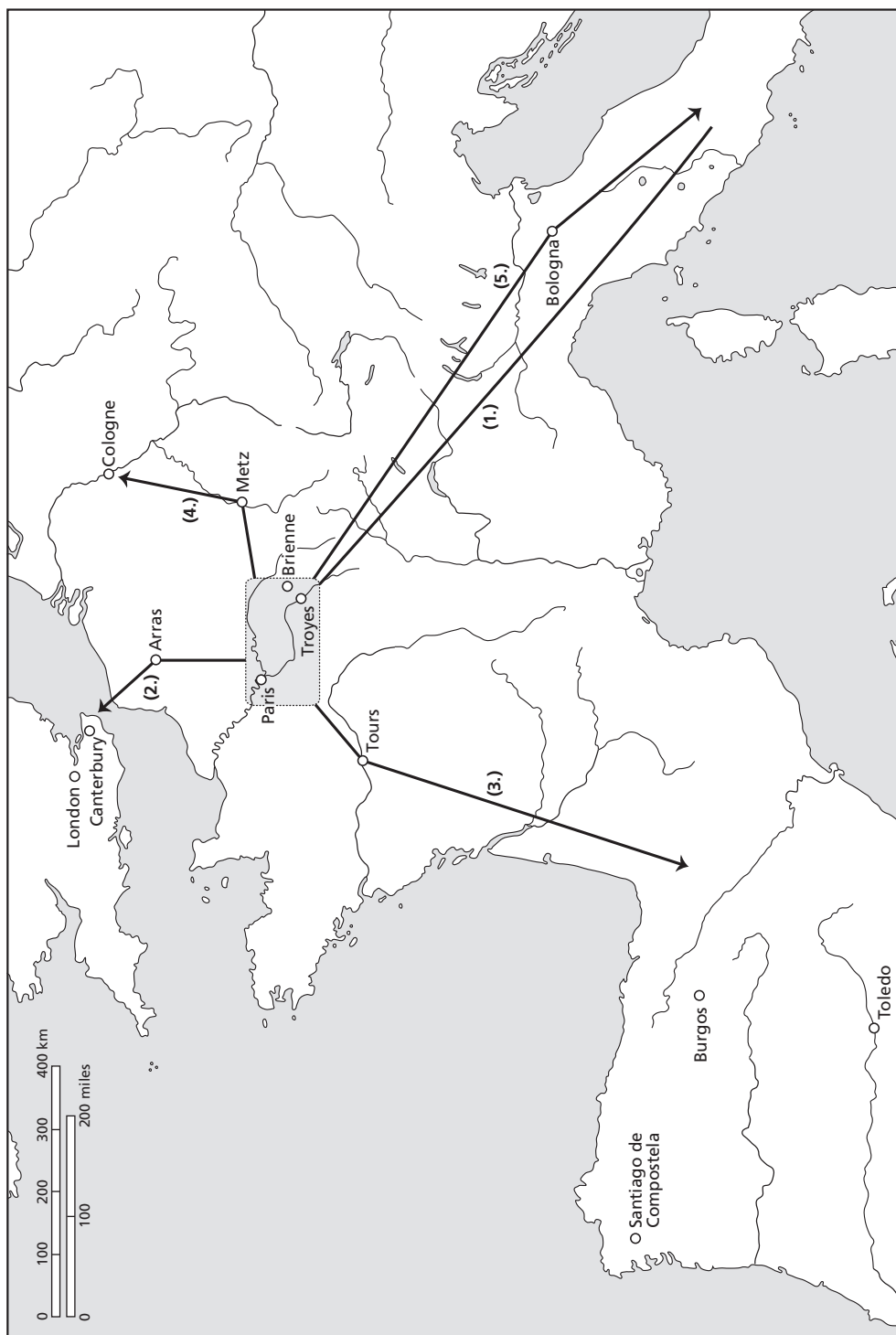
¹⁰ Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 913; *Annales Colonienses maximi*, ed. C. Pertz, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 17, 838; Caesarius of Heisterbach, ‘Vita sancti Engelberti’, in J. Böhmer, ed., *Hermannus Altahensis und andere Geschichtsquellen Deutschlands im dreizehnten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1845), 301.

¹¹ Below, 129–31.

¹² See various Bolognese chronicles in *RİSS2*, XVIII, part 1, vol. 2, 88–9, and part 2, 8.

¹³ Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 120.

¹⁴ See esp. *ibid.*, 121–4; and *Regesta Imperii*, V, part 1, no. 1569.



Map 3 The chronology of King John's 'tour' of the West, 1223-5

only around twelve or thirteen. A flotilla was promptly dispatched to bring her west.¹⁵

It is unsurprising that, in the immediate aftermath of Ferentino, John began his ‘tour’ in his homeland, northeastern France, where he had not set foot for more than a decade. For the time being this would be his base, and he kept returning there. John was well received by Philip Augustus – although, according to Colbert–Fontainebleau, the old king made no secret of his annoyance that he had not had a leading role in selecting a husband for the heiress of Jerusalem, as he had done fifteen years earlier when John himself had married Maria. (What really bothered Philip was that the French crown was no longer the Holy Land’s chief secular protector – a role now filled by the emperor.)¹⁶ Whether or not John was present at the royal court at the time of Philip’s death, on 14 July 1223, he certainly attended the funeral, held at Saint-Denis two weeks later.¹⁷ Philip left the king of Jerusalem a bequest of 3,000 silver marks, as well as more than 150,000 marks ‘so that the king. . . and the [Hospital and the Temple] may employ 300 knights. . . for three years, after the end of their truce with the Saracens’.¹⁸

This brings us naturally to the question of how John supported himself and his retinue during his ‘tour’ years and even beyond, when he was no longer effectively king of Jerusalem. His landed possessions in the West were, of course, now extremely meagre, since he had relinquished the county of Brienne a couple of years earlier. It is possible that, for as long as John remained in control in the Holy Land, he was able to utilise the military orders’ banking networks to get a proportion of his kingdom’s revenues transferred out to him in the West. However, even if he did try to do this, it is debatable how much money this would have brought in, given the parlous state of the crown’s finances. At a minimum, one would expect a flurry of ‘cash flow’ crises. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that, even *before* John actually lost the crown of Jerusalem, the largesse of hosts, relatives, friends and supporters in the West was particularly significant, even vital, to him. Although we do hear a little, from time to time, about other sums that may have passed through John’s hands, the emphasis, in

¹⁵ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 357. It is not clear precisely when, in 1225, John and his wife passed through Orvieto and stayed in the palace of St Martin, but they do seem to have done so (*Annales Urbevetani*, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 19, 269).

¹⁶ See esp. Colbert–Fontainebleau, 356; Ernoul–Bernard, 450; and the *Annales S. Benigni Divionenses*, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 5, 49.

¹⁷ See esp. William the Breton, *Gesta Philippi Augusti* (in *RHGF*, XVII, 116), and *Philippidos* (in *ibid.*, XVII, 280–1); Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 913; Ernoul–Bernard, 450; and the *Annales S. Benigni Divionenses*, 49.

¹⁸ Philip’s will can be found in the *Gesta Philippi Augusti*, in *RHGF*, XVII, 114–5.

our sources, on Philip's bequest confirms that it was the largest and most important contribution to John's ongoing financial needs. We trace the bequest's chequered future as the rest of this chapter proceeds.¹⁹

After attending Louis VIII's coronation at Reims on 6 August 1223, John visited England and Spain (see further, below).²⁰ As Louis himself specifically noted in a letter (*petitio*) to the pope, John seems to have returned from England particularly anxious that the French and English should keep the peace, in the wider interests of the Holy Land.²¹ In Spain, John forged a much closer relationship with the French royal house by marrying Berengaria, niece of the new French queen, Blanche of Castile.²² However, by the time that John returned to northern France, Louis's preparations for a campaign against 'English' Poitou were already far advanced. John was present and, indeed, the first to witness a significant *actum*, when the French host mustered at Tours in June 1224.²³ Before 'diverting to Germany' to visit the Rhineland, John left Berengaria with her aunt, Queen Blanche. The *Gestes du roi Louis VIII* records a grand procession in Paris in John's absence, headed by three queens: Blanche herself, Berengaria and Ingeborg of Denmark, the unfortunate widow of Philip Augustus.²⁴

During his prolonged stays in northeastern France, John doubtless found the time to revisit Champagne, and especially the county of Brienne itself. In fact, the obvious route to the north from Italy lay through the county of Champagne. We know that he was in the vicinity as early as June 1223, thanks to the earlier of a pair of little-known *acta* that John himself issued in 1223–4. These *acta*, as we have already noted, show John acting as a mediator, mainly between his aristocratic close kinsmen in the region: between Matilda of Courtenay, countess of Nevers, and Erard of Chacenay, and between Erard of Brienne (of Ramerupt) and Abbot Albert of Vauluisant.²⁵ These *acta* yield a much better sense of John's place in northern French society at this time. They tell us rather more than

¹⁹ Below, 137, 142.

²⁰ John's presence at Louis's coronation is reported in a large number of narrative accounts, amongst them Ernoul–Bernard, 450; William of Andres, *Chronica*, ed. I. Heller, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 24, 763; *Les gestes du roi Louis VIII* (taken from the *Grandes chroniques de France*), in *RHGF*, XVII, 417; and the *Annales S. Benigni Divionenses*, 49. See also above, Illustration 1.

²¹ See *RHGF*, XIX, 750–1; but also below, 132. ²² Below, 129–31.

²³ See *RHGF*, XXIII, 637. The Tours chronicle suggests that King John's first visit there was on 14 December 1223, when he was received with a procession (*Chronico S. Martini Turonense*, 470). This does not fit very well with what else we know of his activities at around this time. It is possible that there is confusion here with his later visits, in the spring and summer of 1224.

²⁴ *Les gestes du roi Louis VIII*, 419. ²⁵ See below, Appendix 1, nos. 8, 11.

that he was a prestigious, personally trusted figure, useful to close relatives as a means of getting fractious disputes settled, one way or another. John's peace-making activities at this slightly lower level fill out the picture we have of his efforts at higher ones.

John's visit to Spain, in spring 1224, was at least in part a pilgrimage to Compostella. It is the only part of his 'tour' explicitly labelled as a pilgrimage, although he certainly visited a number of other celebrated Western shrines, such as at Canterbury.²⁶ Nevertheless, why go to Spain at all, when the peninsula might yet be regarded, with some justice, as rather 'off the beaten track' when looking for aid for the Holy Land? Various Spanish sources may well mislead us when we are looking for an explanation. In the early 1220s King Alfonso IX of León was certainly looking to establish his daughters by his first marriage, Sancha and Dulce, as his heirs, to prevent his kingdom passing to his younger, estranged son by his second wife – that is, to Ferdinand III, already king of Castile²⁷ (Genealogy 3 should make the following much more readily comprehensible).

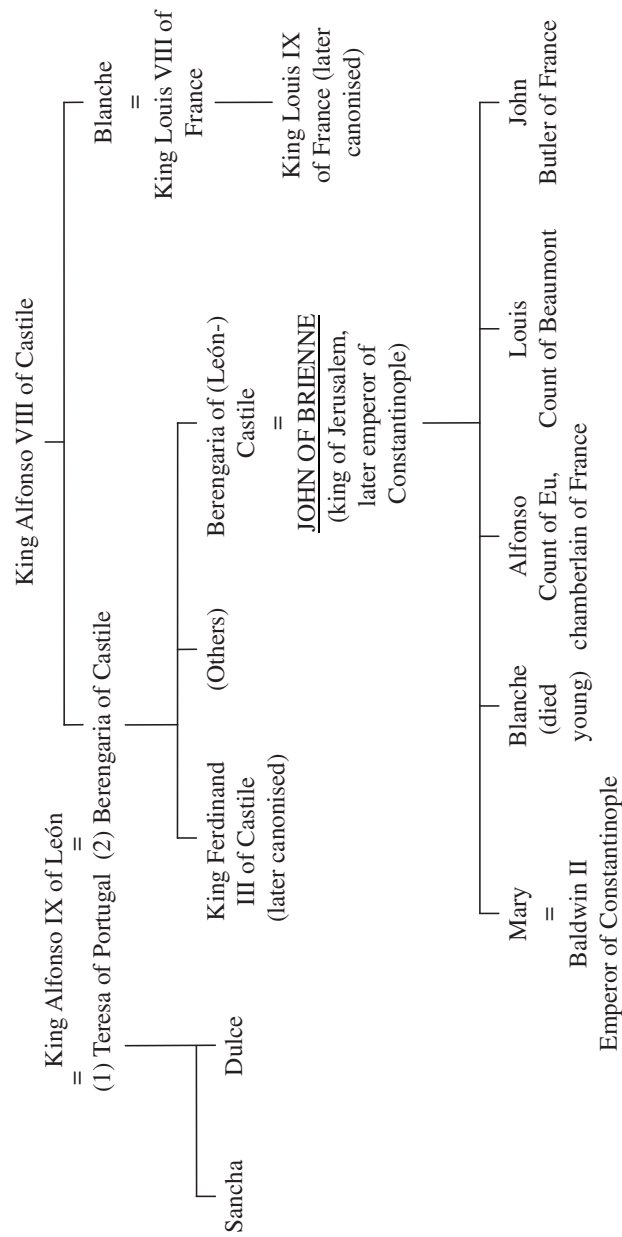
Alfonso may well have been looking for a suitable husband for Sancha, Dulce or both. It is just about believable that John would have been interested, even at this stage of his life and career. Although he clearly still conceived of himself as king of Jerusalem for life, there remained no prospect of siring a line of Brienne kings there. However, the corresponding possibility would be back on the cards at the other end of the Mediterranean if he married Sancha or Dulce. All this lends the faintest whiff of plausibility to what otherwise looks like mere tale-spinning in a number of Spanish narratives. In the words of the *Chronica latina regum Castellae*: 'King John of Jerusalem, *en route* to Santiago, came [to Spain] to take in marriage one of the daughters of the king of León, with whom was promised to him [that] kingdom.'²⁸

Fortunately, it is quite clear what actually happened on John's trip to Spain, besides the completion of his pilgrimage to Compostella. He did not marry either Sancha or Dulce. Instead, he wedded their half-sister, Berengaria – who, although she was also a daughter of Alfonso IX, was firmly on the 'Castilian' side of this particular family rivalry. It seems likely

²⁶ For the 'pilgrimage element' of John's trip to Spain, see esp. the *Chronico S. Martini Turonense*, 470; Colbert-Fontainebleau, 356; Ernoul-Bernard, 450; and the *Chronica latina regum Castellae*, ed. L. Charlo Brea, J. A. Estévez Sola and R. Carande Herrera, in *Corpus christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis* ('Chronica Hispana saeculi XIII'), vol. LXXIII (Turnhout, 1997), ch. 42.

²⁷ See M. Shadis, *Berenguela of Castile (1180–1246) and Political Women in the High Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2009), 110–12.

²⁸ The quote is taken from the *Chronica latina regum Castellae*, ch. 42.



Genealogy 3 John's 'Spanish' marriage

that John finalised arrangements for *this* marriage at Toledo in April, before going on to León to complete his pilgrimage; and that, on his return, the wedding took place.²⁹ The text of the official notification still survives, dated May 1224. The archbishop of Toledo blessed the union between 'John, the king of Jerusalem, and the lady Berengaria, sister of . . . Ferdinand, the illustrious king of Castile, in the church of Burgos'.³⁰ This marriage brought with it no risky war for succession in León. Instead, it bestowed on John an advantage that the Leónese match would not have brought him, namely an intimate family relationship with the royal house of Castile, and hence with that of France (see Genealogy 3). Marrying Berengaria was an excellent back-door route, more or less the best available, into the French royal family. As John had no doubt intended, it proved to be a crucial, highly successful move, from which he and his descendants would derive immense benefit.³¹ All this makes it much more likely that this had been the wedding John had been aiming at, through his trip to Spain, all along. It thus seems that we can write off the Leónese scheme as a red herring.

Around six months before his trip to Spain, John finally fulfilled his long-standing plan of visiting England. We know that the visit took place in 1223, but the sources differ widely on the time of year. Matthew Paris muddies the waters by stating early July, possibly because he is conflating John's visit with a summer trip to England by the master of the Hospital.³² Almost all the other sources that indicate a time of year say that John came separately from the master, in the autumn.³³ Fortunately, there are some little-known *acta* that make it possible for us to be more exact. On 25 September John wrote to the young English king, Henry III, from Arras, a principal town en route from the Paris region to the Pas de Calais. The letter specifically asked Henry to protect John's envoy, John Forestier, who – we are told somewhat cryptically – had enemies in England.³⁴ On 16 November a quitclaim involving Canterbury Cathedral

²⁹ See esp. *ibid.*

³⁰ L. Huidobro y Serna, 'Descendencia de El Cid: Juan de Brienne rey de Jerusalem y Emperador de Constantinopla', *Boletín de la Comisión provincial de monumentos históricos y artísticos de Burgos* 20 (1941), 537–40. Ernoul–Bernard (450), the *Chronica latina regum Castellae* and the *Gestes du roi Louis VIII* (419) all agree that the marriage took place at Burgos.

³¹ See esp. below, 164–5.

³² See Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. H. Luard, 7 vols. (London, 1872–83), III, 82; and *Historia Anglorum*, ed. F. Madden, 3 vols. (London, 1866–9), III, 259.

³³ See the Barnwell chronicler, in *Memoriale fratris Walteri de Coventria: the Historical Collections of Walter of Coventry*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols. (London, 1872–3), II, 252; *Annales monasterii de Waverleia*, in *Annales monastici*, ed. H. Luard, 5 vols. (London, 1864–9), II, 299; and William of Andres, *Chronica*, 763.

³⁴ A short while later, on 3 November, John Forestier was granted a writ of *liberate* for three marks, so extending royal favour and protection. See Appendix 1, below, no. 9.

priory was dated 'the Thursday next after St Martin's day, following the... arrival of John, king of Jerusalem, in England'.³⁵ We may well conclude that John crossed the straits between the issuing of the two documents.

The above quitclaim helps confirm that, in passing, John visited Becket's shrine at Canterbury.³⁶ The English sources are insistent that, despite the hostility between the French and English at this time, King John was well received in their country.³⁷ Part of the reason for this was perhaps English hopes that John could help dissuade the new French king from attacking Poitou. As we have already seen, John did try to do something along these lines when he got back to France, but with little effect.³⁸ Although the English regency government could well have responded to John's visit by ordering a new subsidy for the Holy Land, it is quite possible that such a subsidy was already being raised, following the earlier visit of the master of the Hospital. The edict in question aimed at collecting a large sum – 'from each earl, three marks; from each baron, a mark; from each knight, twelve pence; and from every homestead, a penny'.³⁹ Was John's trip across the Channel largely for the purpose of receiving this money personally – rather than having it dispatched to the East by other means, or never reaching the Holy Land at all? The brevity of his stay in England is perhaps a sign not only of how uncomfortable he felt there but also of how swiftly it became obvious that he would not be laying hands on the subsidy any time soon. In the carefully chosen, expressive words of the Flemish chronicler William of Andres: '[F]inding only foxy ('vulpinos') English people, [King John] hastily returned [to France] at Christmas'.⁴⁰

At this point it is well worth disposing of the notion, either made or popularised by Runciman, that John was later suggested for the English throne. Runciman himself gives no clue as to the source of this idea, though.⁴¹ Perhaps the likeliest origin is a letter sent home by English envoys at Rome, recounting what had happened there in late 1224. The envoys had spent much of the year at the papal Curia, trying to get Pope

³⁵ Ibid., no. 10.

³⁶ Ibid., no. 10; William of Andres, *Chronica*, 763; Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, III, 260; *Annales de Dunstaplia*, in *Annales monastici*, III, 85; and a rather garbled account in the *Annales de Wigornia*, in *ibid.*, IV, 412.

³⁷ The Barnwell chronicler, II, 252; Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson (London, 1875), 194; *Annales de Dunstaplia*, III, 85; Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, III, 259–60.

³⁸ See above, 128; and the *Annales de Dunstaplia*, III, 85.

³⁹ See the Barnwell chronicler, II, 252; Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, 194; and *Annales monasterii de Waverleia*, II, 296.

⁴⁰ William of Andres, *Chronica*, 763; see also the *Annales de Dunstaplia*, III, 85.

⁴¹ Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III, 177.

Honorius to restrain Louis VIII from attacking Poitou. However, they had failed, and the region had been conquered in late summer.⁴² At the end of the year French emissaries, too, arrived in Rome – at a time, it seems, when John himself was passing through on his way to meet Frederick II in southern Italy. It would not be surprising if the French emissaries and John now got the papal ear, insisting that the only real route to peace was for the English to accept the loss of Poitou. The report sent home by the English envoys at this juncture contained a gloss, possibly a later addition. Allegedly, the French emissaries and the king of Jerusalem had threatened that, if anyone at the Curia acted against the French king’s interests, the latter (‘se’) would invade England.⁴³ One wonders whether the explanation is that Runciman’s celebrated skills failed him on this occasion, and that he misunderstood, or misremembered, the ‘se’. He may have taken it as referring not to the king of France (as it does) but, instead, back to the ‘king of Jerusalem’, John himself. This, then, is not a very good explanation; but it is the best we have for the present.

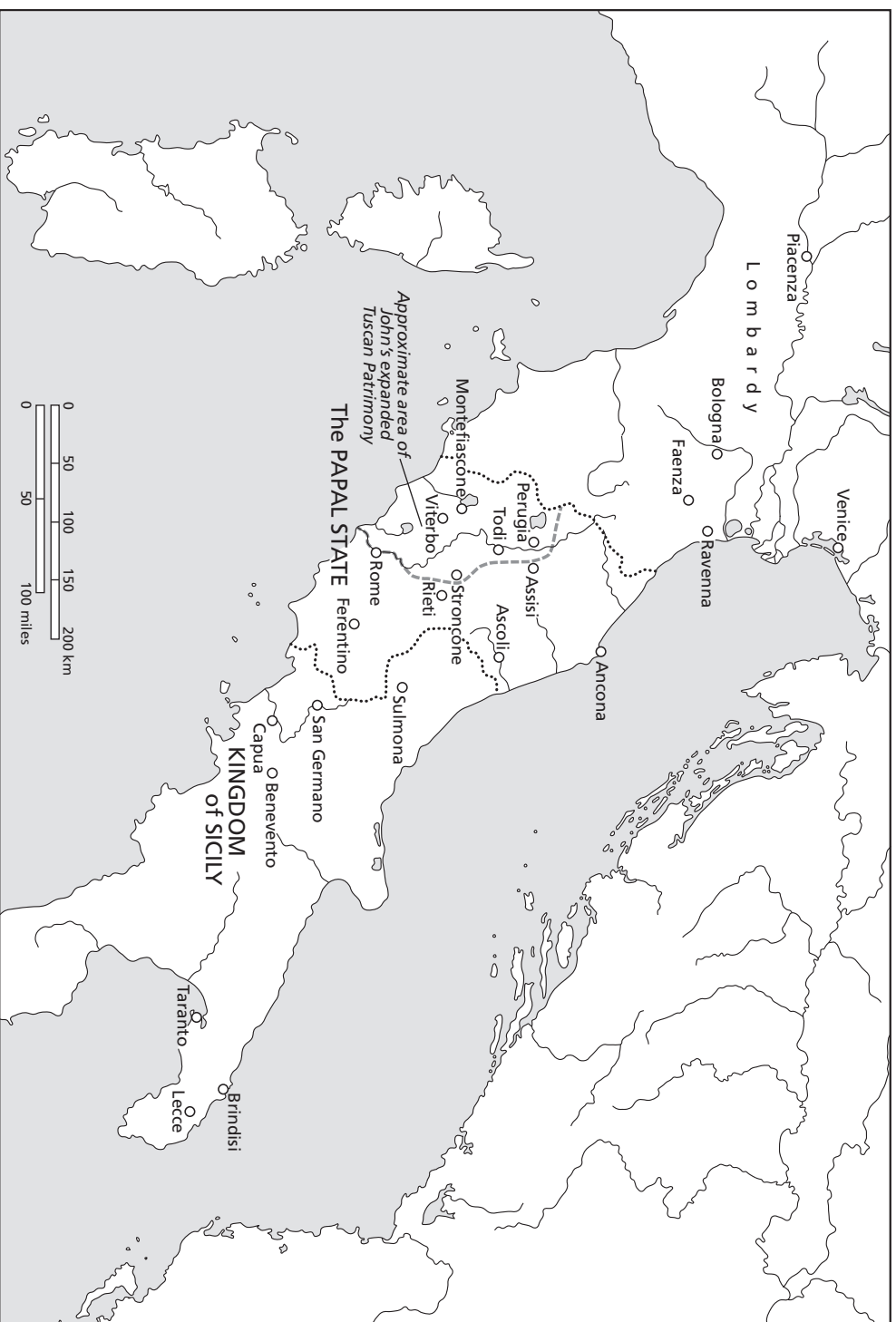
Let us return, at last, to the kingdom of Jerusalem in John’s absence, from 1222 to 1225. The partisan, pro-Ibelin *Gestes des Chiprois* gives a highly faulty impression of the situation there during these last years of John’s rule. It suggests that the Ibelins were back at – indeed, that they had never been away from – the heart of the Jerusalemite polity, playing a central part in the process by which John’s daughter was married, crowned and then dispatched to Italy.⁴⁴ Colbert-Fontainebleau offers a much more accurate picture, though, confirmed by imperial *acta* issued in early 1226. Collectively, these sources show that John’s regime remained in control in his absence, right up until his effective deposition in late 1225–6 – a regime, it is worth remembering, that had long been based on the *exclusion* of the Ibelins. According to Colbert-Fontainebleau, when it was decided, in mid-1225, that the emperor’s marriage to Isabella would go ahead at once, John sent an envoy back to his kingdom, the intriguingly named Guy l’Enfant. It thus seems that John had authorised what ensued, deeming none of it incompatible with his remaining king of Jerusalem for life.⁴⁵ Isabella married Frederick through his proxy, the archbishop of Capua, in the Church of the Holy Cross at Acre. She was then crowned queen of Jerusalem at Tyre, in a ceremony that was surely attended by the vast majority of the leading Jerusalemites who had remained in the East.

⁴² For the context, see D. Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III* (London, 1990), 370–5.

⁴³ This letter can be found conveniently printed in *Diplomatic Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office*, vol. I, 1101–1272, ed. P. Chaplais (London, 1964), no. 153.

⁴⁴ *Les Gestes des Chiprois*, in *RHC: historiens Arméniens*, II, 667–8.

⁴⁵ See *UKJ*, III, D. *643, which Mayer dates to July 25/8 – 31 August 1225.



Map 4 Italy

Colbert–Fontainebleau specifically mentions the *bailli* and constable, Odo of Montbéliard; Simon of Maugastel, archbishop of Tyre; and even King John's old opponent, Walter of Caesarea. However, the Ibelins are conspicuous by their absence. When Isabella then sailed west in the emperor's flotilla, she was accompanied by a grand, if smaller, retinue of Jerusalemites. Once again, though, there is no mention of the Ibelins.⁴⁶

Although John had managed, right to the end, to keep out the Ibelins, the essential fragility of his rule was about to be exposed. Within a matter of weeks even his 'party' would be obliged to abandon him en masse, and accept Frederick as their new king.

November 1225 – and afterwards

Isabella's marriage to Frederick II, on 9 November 1225 at Brindisi, was swiftly followed by a sudden rupture between the emperor and King John. These events were sufficiently dramatic, and consequential, to find reflection in a variety of 'tall tales'. The most bizarre of these is well worth mentioning: the contemporary German 'Tale of King Ortnit', in which John appears as the mighty, heathen and would-be incestuous King Machorel of Jerusalem and 'Montabur' (that is, Mount Tabor).⁴⁷ There are a range of tall tales in the 'historical' narratives, too. Ernoul–Bernard, for example, identifies the Devil himself as the root cause of the trouble. The turning-point in the narrative is reached when the Devil entered into Frederick's heart, inspiring him to seduce John's niece, one of Isabella's women. This brought about a painful scene in which John insulted Frederick and threatened his life, and the emperor, in reply, called on his new father-in-law to quit the kingdom of Sicily.⁴⁸ Several sources also agree that, soon after the marriage, Frederick imprisoned, or otherwise maltreated, his wife.⁴⁹ Colbert–Fontainebleau, for its part, finds rather different reasons why Frederick suddenly turned on John. Apparently, not only had John 'chastised and reproved' the emperor too often, but Frederick had come to believe that John and his nephew, Count Walter IV of Brienne, were plotting to seize the kingdom of Sicily.⁵⁰ The Franciscan chronicler Salimbene seems to have embellished a version of this story – although, for him, it was the kingdom of Jerusalem, not Sicily, that was the Briennes' goal. Afraid that John's kingdom would pass to

⁴⁶ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 358; *Regesta Imperii*, V, part 1, nos. 1590–1.

⁴⁷ This tale is told at length by T. C. Van Cleave, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen: Immutator Mundi* (Oxford, 1972), 163–5.

⁴⁸ Ernoul–Bernard, 451–2.

⁴⁹ See esp. *ibid.*, 453; and the *Chronico S. Martini Turonense*, 471.

⁵⁰ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 359.

Walter, says Salimbene, Frederick laid plans to murder him. The foul deed would be done whilst the unsuspecting Walter was playing chess with the emperor. But King John got wind of the plot, and led his kinsman away, roundly cursing the emperor ‘in his pithy French: “*Fi di becer diabele!*”’ (this phrase is best translated as ‘you son-of-a-butcher!’).⁵¹ Colbert–Fontainebleau suggests that John saved himself and Walter in a rather less dramatic way. They suddenly fled to Rome, where they were greeted with great joy and honour by the pope, Gregory IX.⁵²

It is always worth remembering that Frederick II attracted more scabrous tittle-tattle of this kind than perhaps any other figure of his time. But there *are* kernels of truth hidden deep in all this. Although it is highly unlikely that the emperor actually seduced her, it may well be that John did indeed have a niece amongst Isabella’s women at this time.⁵³ Although there is no good reason to credit the recurrent stories about Frederick committing what was, effectively, domestic abuse, it is nevertheless true that the emperor soon dispatched Isabella to live in relative seclusion on the island of Sicily itself, before setting off for her kingdom of Jerusalem without her. Moreover, the idea of John and Walter trying to seize the kingdom of Sicily is clearly derived from slightly later on – that is, from the ‘War of the Keys’, when they actually did make the attempt. Colbert–Fontainebleau gives the game away when it says that the Briennes fled to Gregory IX. At the time that Colbert–Fontainebleau is ostensibly talking about, Gregory was not pope – yet. But he would be, by the time that John (and probably Walter, too) actually fled to him, in 1229.⁵⁴

However, Colbert–Fontainebleau *is* on the right track about what really happened in November 1225. It says that, as soon as Frederick was married to the new reigning queen of Jerusalem, the emperor ‘called King John to account’, stating that now he had to take from him the kingdom of Jerusalem and all Isabella’s rights.⁵⁵ John was surely stunned by this sudden, blatant repudiation of the Ferentino deal; but, in truth, there was little he could do if his subjects accepted the emperor’s claim. And this they did. The leading Jerusalemmites who had accompanied Isabella to Italy soon acknowledged Frederick as the new king of

⁵¹ Salimbene, *Cronica*, I, 61–2. It is worth noting here the *Chronicle of Amadi*’s notion that Walter did, in the end, perish when playing chess – in a brawl with the Saracen amir who was holding him captive. See the *Chroniques d’Amadi et de Strambaldi*, ed. R. de Mas Latrie (Paris, 1891–3), 202.

⁵² Colbert–Fontainebleau, 359–60.

⁵³ We have already noted that John’s niece, Margaret of Reynel, was married to Balian of Sidon; and Balian was one of the leading Jerusalemmites who escorted Isabella out to Italy for her marriage to Frederick II. It is quite believable, then, that Margaret came along too, as one of the queen’s women.

⁵⁴ Below, 148–9. ⁵⁵ Colbert–Fontainebleau, 358.

Jerusalem, and witnessed for him as such. They included John's close kinsman-by-marriage, Balian of Sidon, and one of John's principal clerical allies, Simon of Maugastel, archbishop of Tyre.⁵⁶ Such actions may rather have made the decision for those left behind in the Holy Land. Be that as it may, the emperor promptly dispatched a legation to the kingdom of Jerusalem to assert his authority. Even the regent there, Odo of Montbéliard, who owed so much of his rise to John, hastily recognised Frederick as king. Odo was then reconfirmed as *bailli*, but on the strict understanding that this was 'in place of the emperor, as he had been in place of King John'.⁵⁷

To Frederick, claiming the crown and its appurtenances naturally also meant demanding donations and aid, such as Philip Augustus's bequest for the use of the king of Jerusalem. Ernoul-Bernard and another source, the Tours chronicle, are therefore quite right to present the future of the bequest as a significant part of the rupture.⁵⁸ It is clear that, for the present, John managed to retain at least that part of the money that was already in his own hands. He was doubtless ready to fight tooth and nail to keep it – not only for financial reasons, but also because to surrender it would be tantamount to conceding Frederick's new status as king of Jerusalem. There is an unintended irony in the fact that the power that eventually obliged John to relinquish the money to the emperor – that is, the papacy – was also the one that would do most to sustain the fiction that John was still king after 1225.⁵⁹

It is fruitless to ask precisely when Frederick decided to renege on the Ferentino arrangement (though it is tempting to believe that he never considered himself really bound by it). A much better line of enquiry is into Frederick's speedy success in winning over the Jerusalemites, and so making his new royal title a reality. He had a strong position in law, as husband to the rightful, reigning queen. The fate of Guy of Lusignan, back in 1190–2, had set a recent precedent for the effective deposition of a king(-consort), once a new candidate had emerged in a better position dynastically vis-à-vis the 'true' royal line.⁶⁰ (However, it is noteworthy that, once he had seized the crown, Frederick radically revised his views on this point, regarding himself as king of Jerusalem for life – precisely the position

⁵⁶ Ibid., 358–9; *Regesta Imperii*, V, part 1, nos. 1590–1, and also no. 1588. Frederick seems to have rewarded Simon with the office of chancellor of the kingdom of Jerusalem. However, Simon held it for only a couple of years or so, before his own rupture with the emperor. See Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 356–9; and below, 150.

⁵⁷ Colbert-Fontainebleau, 359.

⁵⁸ Ernoul-Bernard, 452; *Chronico S. Martini Turonense*, 471–2. ⁵⁹ See esp. below, 139.

⁶⁰ For this, see esp. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 20–3.

that he had so roughly denied to John.) Few eminent Jerusalemites, at this stage, were likely to resist the legitimate claims of an individual of Frederick's power and stature, which in turn held out the tremendous promise that he was indeed the divinely intended saviour or restorer of the Latin Christian position in the Holy Land. Once Frederick had declared his kingship, there may well have been a pervasive sense that he and it were unstoppable, both amongst the Jerusalemite elites present in the kingdom of Sicily and, slightly later, in the Holy Land itself. What chances John had of orchestrating resistance and rescuing his crown soon evaporated, as he was caught woefully out of position, stranded in southern Italy and abandoned even by the Jerusalemites there. In the event, then, all that really stood in the emperor's way was the promise he had made at Ferentino. So he simply tore it up, with devastating effect.

It is arguable, though, that Frederick committed a major political error when he claimed the crown straight after his marriage. His chicanery and bullying did considerable damage to his reputation, as the pope reminded him.⁶¹ Moreover, was it really necessary for Frederick actually to grab the throne at this stage, since he was already in a position of 'virtual regality' over the king and kingdom of Jerusalem anyway? If he had been prepared to leave John the crown for life, he might well have been able to use him as a sort of ready-made viceroy in the kingdom. But perhaps it would be unrealistic to expect such behaviour from the emperor, since the golden rule of medieval politics may be described as 'seize and exercise what claims you can'. With a characteristic combination of aggression and impatience with legal ambiguity, born of a fervent conviction that he was acting in accordance with the divine plan, Frederick had evidently become convinced that he had to 'move ruthlessly toward the acquisition of his [own] full. . . rights' – as he saw them – and had to do so at once after his marriage.⁶² Equally characteristically, he thereby made John his enemy for life.⁶³

It is likely that John rushed to complain to the pope in the immediate aftermath of his rupture with Frederick.⁶⁴ Honorius III probably felt compelled to take some kind of stand against the emperor, because his own prestige was at stake. The Ferentino undertaking, as we have seen,

⁶¹ Below, 139–40. ⁶² Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II*, 166.

⁶³ Paraphrasing Tyerman, *God's War*, 741.

⁶⁴ Is this the true meaning of Colbert–Fontainebleau (359–60) and Ernoul–Bernard, which agree that John went to Rome after his rupture with Frederick? We know that the pope was not there; he was at Rieti. For its part, Ernoul–Bernard suggests that there was some sort of alliance, sealed with cash, between John and the Romans at this time (452). If so, then it was a precursor to his subsequent, far more significant involvement with the Lombards and the Papal State.

could well have been made under papal auspices. Undoubtedly, Honorius agreed with John on the fundamental point: that John was still the rightful king of Jerusalem. Henceforth, for almost six years, the papacy continued to accord the title to John, whilst pointedly denying it to Frederick.⁶⁵

Frederick's shabby treatment of John undoubtedly created a further running sore in papal–Hohenstaufen relations. It is easy to believe that this was the start of a new 'round' of deterioration. But it is worth focusing, for a moment, on the full impact of the papacy's denial of the title of king of Jerusalem to Frederick, since this has never yet been properly explored. The denial *was* a significant factor that helped poison all efforts to restore real trust and amity between pope and emperor in 1226–7. Every letter that the pair sent each other during this period – no matter how conciliatory its contents – began with a slap in the face, as the title in question was either asserted, or implicitly denied. Furthermore, this same basic problem made the whole business of Frederick's crusade even more fraught than it would otherwise have been, for, during these years, the papacy was persistently pressing the emperor to fulfil his crusade vow, but all to rescue a kingdom that the pope did not even recognise as his. Whilst it is not difficult to see why the papacy took this line, for Frederick its apparent fundamental inconsistency could well have been truly maddening. In the end, all this was just more fuel for the fire in the great conflagration of 1227–30, the 'War of the Keys' between the papacy and the emperor.⁶⁶

For all his backing of John, Honorius was not prepared really to turn on Frederick to force him to relinquish the crown of Jerusalem. At the time that the rupture broke open between the emperor and John, the pope urgently needed Frederick's help to reinstall himself and the Curia in Rome, and this was achieved in February 1226.⁶⁷ So, from the first, Honorius adopted a policy of dialogue, which was better suited to his temperament, in any case. But, whilst this approach did passably well at resolving the issues that concerned the papacy the most, it was not conducive at all to bringing about John's restoration. Interestingly, it was not until a full six months had passed that the pope broached the matter in a letter to the emperor, and, even then, he did so only briefly. Honorius opened his letter, as had already become usual, by studiously neglecting to accord Frederick the title of 'king of Jerusalem'. Bolder now, he sharply stated the papal view on a range of key matters concerning the emperor. He reminded Frederick that the papacy wished to mediate between him and 'that eminent man, your father-in-law'. Honorius stressed the damage that the whole sorry affair had done, not

⁶⁵ See esp. below, 156. ⁶⁶ Below, 144–9, 156.

⁶⁷ D. Waley, *The Papal State in the Thirteenth Century* (London, 1961), 131.

only to the emperor's reputation but also to 'the business of the Holy Land'.⁶⁸

By the time of this letter, though, John had begun to pursue his own, far more aggressive line against Frederick. It is noteworthy that he did not sail back to the kingdom of Jerusalem to foment civil war there. There were attractive prospects much nearer at hand in 1226. The emperor's proposed expedition to northern Italy proved quite sufficient, as a threat, to bring about the revival of the old Lombard League, an alliance of northern Italian cities directed against Frederick's family, the imperial house of Hohenstaufen. Here, then, were ready-made allies for John; small wonder that he quickly found his way to them.

What has seldom been noticed is just how close John and Frederick were to one another, geographically speaking, in early 1226. Already at Ravenna in April, Frederick settled his troops in an encampment near the hostile town of Faenza.⁶⁹ John's route north is less well known, but Tolosanus makes it clear in his *Chronicon Faventinum*. In April John travelled via Ascoli to Ancona, where he deposited his (again pregnant) wife, Berengaria. Then he went on to Faenza. Tolosanus proudly reports that the 'king of Jerusalem' visited his home town: 'The Faentini honourably received him, and most generously paid his expenses, the emperor being at Ravenna.'⁷⁰ In other words, John seems to have been loitering about in towns that were near to Frederick but hostile to him. It seems plain that John was doing his utmost to stir up trouble for the emperor in Lombardy.

The Lombard League had good reason to be interested in an alliance with John. The aggrieved 'king of Jerusalem' could be much more to them than a mere figurehead. A celebrated soldier, perhaps he would lead their hosts against the emperor. Most importantly, we may guess, John was known to be a papal protégé, whose cause had Honorius's sympathy. With an eye on the events of the previous half-century, the league may well have recognised that the Church's backing – which it did not have at present – was the *sine qua non* for successful resistance to Frederick. Ernoul-Bernard spins a rather characteristic tale about what happened when John moved on from Faenza, in mid-1226, up the road to Bologna, the league headquarters in the region. Hearing that John was in the city, we are told, the consuls or *podestà* of Lombardy assembled, came to him and offered to 'make him king of [all their] land'. John refused, but nevertheless signalled his willingness to remain in Lombardy for as long as the

⁶⁸ Honorius III, *Regesta*, II, no. 5967.

⁶⁹ See esp. Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II*, 182–4.

⁷⁰ Tolosanus, *Chronicon Faventinum*, in *RIS2*, XXVIII, part 1, 153–4.

towns wished. This is the point at which Frederick is said to have beaten Isabella so brutally that she almost lost the child with which she was pregnant. He then locked her in a tower. But Frederick soon found that he had no choice other than to plead to her father for peace; and John pardoned him, even making a good settlement between the emperor and the Lombards.⁷¹

Almost the only nugget of truth in this whole farrago is that there was indeed an alliance of some sort between John and either Bologna or the Lombard League at large. John stayed in the city, apparently for 'six months and more' – perhaps the second half of 1226. In early October John's infant daughter, named Blanche after the French queen, died. She was buried with honour in the cathedral of San Pietro. Unfortunately, her tomb can no longer be seen, amidst the Baroque splendour of the interior.⁷²

By the end of the year the papacy had clearly come to recognise that the main thing hindering preparations for Frederick's crusade was the Lombard revolt, which John was encouraging.⁷³ Honorius was therefore looking to get John out of northern Italy. On 27 January 1227 the dying pope made a last-ditch appeal to Frederick. This is the only extant papal letter that has King John's restoration as its main subject. Honorius addressed the emperor as usual, omitting the title of king of Jerusalem, which he subsequently accords to John. He tried to win Frederick over through a combination of reasoned argument and impassioned rhetoric: 'To whom more faithful would it be possible to entrust the kingdom of Jerusalem? Who would be more welcome to the faithful living there? Who is more terrifying to the infidel? Who is more useful to the whole business of the Holy Land?'⁷⁴ Yet his other actions perhaps show that the pope himself thought he had little chance of success. On the very same day – to make sure that, whatever happened, John would leave Lombardy – Honorius appointed him rector of the Patrimony of St Peter in Tuscany.⁷⁵

In the service of the pope, and the War of the Keys

By the thirteenth century the papacy had long held both land and claims in central Italy. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the 'Papal State', as we may call it, was effectively founded by Innocent III. So, like the Latin empire of

⁷¹ Ernoul-Bernard, 452–4.

⁷² See various Bolognese chronicles in *RiSS2*, part 1, vol. 2, 90–1.

⁷³ See Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 158–61.

⁷⁴ The pope also sent the abbot of St Martin of Viterbo to discuss the matter with Frederick (Honorius III, *Regesta*, II, no. 6202).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, nos. 6203–4.

Constantinople that John would rule subsequently, it was a 'new' state, in the process of trying to settle down. But this was never really achieved. Already by the mid-1220s, though, the rectorate had emerged as arguably the key day-to-day governmental institution in most of the Papal State's principal 'provinces', a rector in each. On the comparatively rare occasions that a rector was a layman, he could be assigned an ecclesiastical associate to wield the spiritual powers that were beyond his competence. As rector of the Tuscan Patrimony, John, still recognised by the papacy as the rightful king of Jerusalem, seems to have had one of these: the sub-deacon and papal chaplain, Alatrino.⁷⁶

It is not difficult to see why John accepted the post of rector. It was the best prospect open to him at the time, and it kept him close to the papacy, perhaps his only real hope for restoration in the Holy Land. What is not so clear is precisely why the papacy appointed him.⁷⁷ We have already suggested that a substantial part of the reason was to get John out of Lombardy. What else? Various sources dwell on the papacy's commitment to sustain, and *be seen to be sustaining*, its conspicuous and beleaguered protégé, John.⁷⁸ Waley, for his part, has rightly drawn attention to a particular key distinction between John and most other rectors: 'He differed from [them]...in being granted certain revenues [from] the territories [that] he ruled.'⁷⁹ Recognising that John now had little money and few sources of income left, the papacy was making sure that, in his new post, he would be properly provided for, befitting his royal dignity, as John and the Church still conceived it. An important consequence was that the papacy was now in a position to pressurise John into surrendering, to Frederick, Philip Augustus's bequest, as funding for the imperial crusade to the Holy Land. John's release of this money thus should not be seen either as a sign of rare rapprochement between him and the emperor or as a product of 'natural piety'.⁸⁰ Rather, it seems, the pope had compelled him to do it.

The most likely scenario, though, is that the Church really wanted John as a soldier – as a kind of early *condottiere*. John's military reputation was

⁷⁶ Ibid., nos. 6203, 6216; Gregory IX, *Registres*, ed. L. Auvray, 4 vols. (Paris, 1890–1955), nos. 34–5; Waley, *The Papal State*, 104, 137, 312, 319. The rectorate of John and of other 'outsiders' ('extranei') seems to have provoked a reaction from within the college of cardinals not all that long afterwards, in the mid-1230s, when the college sought to restrict the rectorate to themselves only. This proposal, though, never really got off the ground (see esp. *ibid.*, 139–40).

⁷⁷ As Waley rightly notes, 'King John...fits into no convenient category [amongst the Papal State's lay rectors]' (*ibid.*, 103).

⁷⁸ See esp. Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 141; Colbert-Fontainebleau, 360; Ernoul-Bernard, 454.

⁷⁹ Waley, *The Papal State*, 137. ⁸⁰ *Chronico S. Martini Turonense*, 476.

high in the West, above all as a result of his long years of high-profile, gruelling campaigning leading the Fifth Crusade. In addition, he had worked hard, as we have seen, to try to elude responsibility for that expedition's disastrous end. The prime reason for John's appointment is plain, if we look closely at its terms. As rector, John was granted not merely the Tuscan Patrimony, as usually conceived, but a significantly extended version, taking in the key city of Perugia to the northwest, and encompassing towns such as Todi and Stroncone across the river Tiber.⁸¹ A substantial unit had thus been brought into being, fit to face down the turbulent city of Rome itself – which was bent on a policy of northerly expansion, above all at the expense of the papacy and the patrimony.⁸²

The new pope, Gregory IX, moved swiftly to confirm John's appointment and get him firmly established in his province. On 5 April 1227 Gregory issued a letter to the faithful there, informing them that he had entrusted their rule to King John, 'so that we might better provide for your tranquillity and peace'.⁸³ In the early months of his rectorate, John may have been based in the patrimony's northern heartland, doing his best to police that area, and block any signs of Roman aggression. A useful pointer can perhaps be found in Richard of San Germano's note, saying that John had been granted territory to rule 'from Viterbo to Montefiascone'.⁸⁴ Whilst this represented only a tiny fraction of the land allocated to John, it was, in fact, the area most threatened by the Romans at this time.⁸⁵ Gregory soon decided to install himself and the Curia at Perugia – probably the Papal State's second city after troublesome Rome, and, of course, within John's province and so under his guard. The pope was obliged to pay Perugia a sizeable amount, which Waley may be right to call '[a] bribe, in return for which Perugia consented to become [Gregory's] headquarters and to take as its *podestà* his henchman, John of Brienne'.⁸⁶ We know that when John quit the city to take part in the War of the Keys, he left behind a 'vicar', or *bailli*, in his place. This was Peter of Altomanno, whom John would later describe as a 'dear and faithful knight of ours'.⁸⁷ John's trust in Peter was amply

⁸¹ Honorius III, *Regesta*, II, 6203–4, 6209.

⁸² See esp. the analysis by Waley, *The Papal State*, 137, 141.

⁸³ Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 45. ⁸⁴ Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 141.

⁸⁵ The Romans campaigned against Viterbo in 1228 and again in 1229. See Waley, *The Papal State*, 141.

⁸⁶ See esp. Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 34, which perhaps casts some doubt on the figures put forward by Waley in *The Papal State*, 141.

⁸⁷ Below, Appendix 1, no. 13; and the 'treaty of Rieti', in *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig*, ed. G.L.F. Tafel and G.M. Thomas, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1856–7), II, nos. 277, 279.

demonstrated again in spring 1231, when he sent him as his envoy to Venice, to negotiate transportation to Constantinople.⁸⁸

In the summer of 1228 Gregory briefly left Perugia for nearby Assisi, to canonise his old friend, the recently deceased Francis, and to lay the foundation stone for a great new basilica to house his relics. It seems that John accompanied the pope. Thomas of Celano's *First Life* of St Francis does indicate the presence of royalty on this occasion, and this surely refers to 'King' John.⁸⁹ Confirmation can perhaps be found in the symbiotic growth of John's contacts with, and personal affection for, the burgeoning Franciscan Order. The king may well have had dealings with Friars Minor when both he and they were working to promote Frederick's crusade and the 'business of the Holy Land'. Such interaction surely became more frequent once John was a leading figure in the Papal State, intimately connected with Gregory IX, who was arguably the principal architect of the Franciscans' rise.⁹⁰ From his windows in Perugia, John could look across the valley to Assisi, to be reminded of its greatest son, and of the massive building project that was about to get under way there. But he could not have foreseen the convoluted process by which that basilica *may* have ended up as his own final resting place.⁹¹

A complete rupture between the papacy and Frederick II, which John had presumably wanted for some time, occurred suddenly in September 1227 – when the consummation of the papal–Hohenstaufen partnership should have occurred. Soon after finally sailing on crusade, Frederick had been obliged to return to Italy when both he and his host had been severely attacked by plague. By turning back, Frederick had unquestionably breached the stringent terms that he had agreed two years earlier, at San Germano. Gregory IX – of a quite different mettle from Honorius – would listen to no excuses, and seized his opportunity to strike at the emperor, excommunicating him, and laying plans to seize his kingdom of Sicily (which, according to the papal view of things, Frederick held of the papacy). The ensuing war – a sort of semi-crusade against the excommunicate emperor – has colourfully been labelled the 'War of the Keys', on account of the insignia of St Peter, borne by the papal forces.⁹²

⁸⁸ Below, 154–5.

⁸⁹ Thomas of Celano, *Vita prima S. Francisci Assisiensis*, sect. 124, in *Analecta Franciscana*, X, fasc. 1. See also R. L. Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 232–4, in his *Studies in the Latin Empire of Constantinople*.

⁹⁰ See esp. Robson, *St Francis of Assisi*, ch. 5. ⁹¹ Below, 183–8.

⁹² For the war's status as a sort of semi-crusade, see esp. G. A. Loud, 'The papal "crusade" against Frederick II in 1228–30', in M. Balard, ed., *La papauté et les croisades* (Farnham, 2011), 91–103.

Frederick bravely and brazenly prepared to redepart for the Holy Land anyway, finally sailing again in June 1228. By then, though, his status there was somewhat altered. He was no longer king of Jerusalem as husband to the reigning queen. Isabella, aged only fifteen or sixteen, had died a month earlier – like her mother, just after childbirth – leaving behind an infant son, Conrad. Frederick was able to take advantage of the precedent established by King John back in 1212–13, though. Not only did the emperor retain the crown of Jerusalem during Conrad's minority, but, even after that, he continued to regard himself as king of Jerusalem for life.⁹³

Frederick's crusade of 1228–9 presents one of the most remarkable spectacles of the entire medieval period. But, within it all, the question of who the rightful king of Jerusalem was was rather more important than has usually been realised. The emperor, the secular head of Latin Christendom, was now embarked on the crusade that the papacy had been demanding for so long, to what was widely recognised as his own kingdom of Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the papacy not only denied that Frederick was king there; it was also working to destroy the excommunicate emperor and his 'anti-crusade', putting armies together to secure his overthrow in the West. In other words, the papacy was doing precisely what Frederick himself had done to John a few years earlier: trying to 'steal' his kingdom in his absence. Moreover, at or near the head of the papal forces would be John, whom the papacy still regarded as the true king of Jerusalem.⁹⁴

John was 'an obvious choice', for the papacy, to take a leading role in the war.⁹⁵ In the eyes of the Church, he was the highest-ranking, most experienced military leader available, with the bonus of a bitter, personal grudge against Frederick. For his part, Gregory could undoubtedly recall the train of triumphs that Count Walter III of Brienne had achieved in southern Italy more than twenty years earlier, fighting the Hohenstaufen there with papal blessing. If only King John could now go one better than his brother, winning a complete and final victory.

What, though, was John himself really looking for out of the war? It is clear that his chief goal changed over time; and most or all of the change was made during the year-long hiatus between the war first being on the cards and the start of the actual fighting (that is, from October 1227 to autumn 1228). At first, John was surely looking to be restored as king of Jerusalem, but perhaps it was Isabella's death, in May, that altered this.

⁹³ Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 172–4; and above, 69.

⁹⁴ Expanded from Tyerman, *God's War*, 747; 'anti-crusade' is taken from Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 170.

⁹⁵ Waley, *The Papal State*, 138.

Maybe John recognised, in his heart of hearts, that this event really severed the Brienne dynastic cord that justified his right to rule in the Holy Land, for all his proud claim to be king there for life.⁹⁶ John may well have come to focus increasingly, in the succeeding months, on the prospects now opening up in the kingdom of Sicily. The chances are that Gregory was hoping to absorb the kingdom into the Papal State, in effect partitioning it amongst the Church's clients and supporters. The pope would have had most reason to reward those who had led the forces of 'the Keys' to triumph.

This brings in the young count of Brienne, Walter IV.⁹⁷ His participation in the war, alongside John, is confirmed in several sources.⁹⁸ Walter could boast a variety of claims in southern Italy – even to the crown of Sicily itself. At the very least, he was looking to recover those old family heirlooms, the principality of Taranto and the county of Lecce.⁹⁹ For his part, John had no such claims, but he could well have been hoping for substantial gains anyway, at Frederick's expense. Maybe the Briennes could run southern Italy in tandem, so effectively recreating Walter III's old dominance over the mainland.

A suggestion can even be found, in the sources available, that John aspired to replace Frederick at the very highest level: as emperor. In a letter hurriedly dashed off to Frederick, Count Thomas of Acerra reports that 'John of Brienne [has been heard to] assert that there is no emperor, other than himself'.¹⁰⁰ However, this surely reflects not some fantastically implausible scheme of John's in the West but, rather, a garbled version of his negotiations for the eastern imperial throne of Constantinople. These negotiations seem to have got under way in late 1228 – almost exactly the same time that John actually took up arms in the War of the Keys. He agreed to become emperor quite quickly. The final deal was sealed in

⁹⁶ For the date of Isabella's death, see *UKY*, III, 1070.

⁹⁷ It is worth noting that, in the late 1220s, one of Walter IV's counter-seals was decorated with what looks rather like the cross and crosslets of the kingdom of Jerusalem – perhaps underlining his close connection with the royal house, and supporting the idea that John was still the rightful king. See the illustration in Roserot, *Dictionnaire historique de la Champagne méridionale*, I, 245. The same seal is also discussed by Nielen, 'Du comté de Champagne aux royaumes d'Orient', 598.

⁹⁸ We have already noted that various accounts of Frederick's plot to kill Walter are actually based on events that took place in 1229, following Walter's involvement in the War of the Keys (see above, 135–6). In addition, the contemporary Champenois chronicler Aubry of Troisfontaines – who is normally well informed about the thirteenth-century Briennes – clearly confirms Walter's participation (*Chronicon*, 925).

⁹⁹ Above, 33.

¹⁰⁰ This letter can be found in Roger of Wendover's *Flores historiarum*, II, 358–60.

April 1229, as we shall see.¹⁰¹ The fundamental point, to draw out of all this, is a complex but important one. For the vast majority, or perhaps *all*, of the time that John was actually fighting the Hohenstaufen forces, he was either in serious negotiations for the title of, or else had already agreed to become, Latin emperor – looking more to Constantinople, it seems, than at prospective gains to be made from Frederick in southern Italy.

However, it is not surprising that the War of the Keys is all too easily seen as a sort of ‘grudge match’ between the Briennes and the Hohenstaufen.¹⁰² This can lead to an undue fixation on John, as the leading combatant on the papal side. He is often understood to have been the supreme military commander of the Church’s forces, but it is not absolutely clear that he actually had this role. What is notable is that, when the fighting began, it was John, together with Cardinal John Colonna (and perhaps Walter IV, too), who were given the most pressing military task. This was to halt Frederick’s ‘vicar’, Rainald of Urslingen, who had opened the war proper by invading the Papal State in the autumn of 1228. The ‘Brienne–Colonna’ army notched up a series of creditable successes against Rainald. But, in the end, it was the victory of the other, perhaps the *main*, papal host that prompted Rainald’s withdrawal from the Papal State. This ‘main host’ was assigned to counter-invade the kingdom of Sicily, and in the process turn Rainald’s flank. When this host broke through to Benevento and Capua, Rainald retreated to the fastness of Sulmona, which John and Colonna then started to besiege.¹⁰³

At this juncture, it appears that John briefly left his army at Sulmona and returned to the papal Curia at Perugia. There, in April 1229, he sealed the agreement by which he would become Latin emperor of Constantinople.¹⁰⁴ Although this would seem to have settled his future irrespective of the outcome of the war, he soon returned to the field. John was coming back to a situation in which the papacy was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain its hosts in the war. Above all, there were severe financial problems. These gave rise to scandalous accusations, for instance that John’s troops were paid with plunder seized from religious houses.¹⁰⁵ When Cardinal Colonna eventually ‘abandoned’ the army to return to the Papal State, the chances are that he did indeed do so in an endeavour to obtain the

¹⁰¹ Below, 151.

¹⁰² The following principal sources all present the war, to some extent at least, in this way: Colbert–Fontainebleau, 373–9; Ernoul–Bernard, 466–8; Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 152–61; Roger of Wendover, *Flores historiarum*, II, 358–60, 381–3; and Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 925.

¹⁰³ See esp. Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 152, 157; Waley, *The Papal State*, 134–5; and Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II*, 211.

¹⁰⁴ Below, 151. ¹⁰⁵ Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, III, 188, 194.

money needed to pay it.¹⁰⁶ By the late spring of 1229 the papacy had thrown its last military reserves into the Abruzzi – amongst them John's former sparring partner in difficult times, the legate Pelagius. Pelagius promptly appealed to the Johns, Brienne and Colonna, for help. Breaking off their (fruitless?) siege at Sulmona, the pair managed to link up with the legate. Brought so close together, all the main papal forces now converged, near Capua.¹⁰⁷

John and his allies knew that their real trump card was the absence of Frederick II to defend his own. So they may well have been looking to infiltrate the obvious ports, so as to capture the emperor as he returned from the East. In fact, in Thomas of Acerra's letter to Frederick, the count identifies John alone as the figure carrying out this strategy. However, Thomas could well be falling here into the trap of focusing on John unduly, to the exclusion of all the other papal leaders.¹⁰⁸ Whatever the truth on this particular point, though, a triumphalist Frederick landed at Brindisi – from which he had sailed, almost exactly a year earlier – on 10 June. Well aware of what was happening behind his back, the emperor had needed a quick and easy victory in the Holy Land, and so he had leapt at the kind of treaty with al-Kamil that the Fifth Crusade had twice turned down. In this way, Frederick won back the city of Jerusalem, however precariously, without striking a blow. Superficially at least, he had succeeded where all Latin Christendom had failed for more than forty years. He returned to his war-torn Sicilian kingdom as the excommunicate emperor who had nevertheless reacquired the Holy City, and worn his crown imperial in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.¹⁰⁹

Frederick's return tipped the balance decisively. The papal hosts near Capua could not prevent a general Hohenstaufen muster in the city, where the emperor himself soon took command. Frederick's subsequent advance quickly brought about the complete disintegration of the pope's forces. In some ways, it was a rerun of the end of the Fifth Crusade. John was again unable to prevent a military collapse in the company of the 'ill-starred' Pelagius. When the campaign was finished, Frederick was able to gloat to his new ally, al-Kamil.¹¹⁰ John, Pelagius (and Walter IV?)

¹⁰⁶ See Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 160–1; and Loud, 'The papal "crusade" against Frederick II', 102–3.

¹⁰⁷ See esp. Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 157–8, 160.

¹⁰⁸ Roger of Wendover, *Flores historiarum*, II, 360, and also 381.

¹⁰⁹ Probably the best short summary of Frederick's crusade can be found in Tyerman's *God's War*, 739–55.

¹¹⁰ See Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II*, 229; *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, tr. F. Gabrieli and E.J. Costello (Abingdon, 2009), 282; and Fedorenko, 'The crusading career of John of Brienne', 72.

drew breath at San Germano, before finally withdrawing into the Papal State.¹¹¹

John is easily smeared as ‘fleeing’ all the way back to France.¹¹² But this is not fair, as an important papal letter reveals. Since the war was now effectively over, John had clearly secured permission to quit his command and offices in the Papal State, so as to return to his homeland, northeastern France – there to begin the new task of raising men and money for his expedition to Constantinople.¹¹³

The call of Constantinople

The Latin empire of Constantinople’s desperate need for a regent stemmed from the unhappy circumstances of both the rule and the death of the Emperor Robert of Courtenay (r. 1221–8). His had been a reign of decay and defeat. By the end of it, it looked as though the new Latin empire was already on its last legs. In the east, the empire faced the serious threat of a Greek imperial rival, now usually called the ‘Empire of Nicaea’, under John III Doukas Vatatzes, who had reduced the Latins’ holdings in Asia Minor to Nicomedia and a strip of land opposite Constantinople. But, at the same time, in the late 1220s a far greater danger was presented by another Greek rival, Theodore of Epiros, who was at the walls of Constantinople itself in the west. Indeed, it looked as if Theodore would win the race to recapture Constantinople, so confirming himself as the true emperor, and his state as the real ‘Byzantium-in-exile’. The nadir came, for Robert, with a limited but savage, rather Byzantine-looking palace coup, which ended with his wife mutilated and her mother drowned in the Bosphorus. The humiliated emperor withdrew to Italy, where he laid his misery at the papal feet. Perhaps John had met him there. Persuaded by Gregory to return to Constantinople, Robert died en route, in Greece, at the start of 1228.

Robert’s heir was his younger brother Baldwin, only around eleven years old, and so a regent was needed – preferably, a powerful outsider who would bring in the aid that Latin Constantinople urgently required. An interested party, who in some ways fitted the bill, was Ivan (John) Asen, king of the Vlachs and Bulgars. At least theoretically in communion with the Roman Church, Asen had been Latin Constantinople’s chief

¹¹¹ Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 161.

¹¹² For instance, in Roger of Wendover’s *Flores historiarum*, II, 383; and Matthew Paris’s *Chronica majora*, III, 194. See also Matthew Paris, *Abbreviatio cronicorum Angliae*, ed. F. Liebermann, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 28, 447.

¹¹³ See the ‘Lettre de Grégoire IX concernant l’empire latin de Constantinople’, ed. J. van Gheyn, *Revue de l’Orient latin* 9 (1902), 230–4; see also below, 152.

protector for several years. His benevolence was, of course, ‘far from disinterested’; and it looked as though it would be rewarded when it was agreed that Asen would become regent for Baldwin, and that the boy would marry his young daughter. It is not surprising, though, that this arrangement collapsed even before it had been implemented. Despite all that he had done to assist the Latins of Constantinople, Asen remained a deeply suspect figure to them. Making him regent, it was increasingly felt, would be more or less the same as admitting the end of the Latin imperial project: cheaply surrendering the city to a fundamentally alien power.¹¹⁴

John’s may well have been the first name on a shortlist of one, to replace Asen. It is easy to pick out the main points in his favour. He was an available, Frankish-French figure of royal stature, who had experience, second to none, of ruling a beleaguered yet prestigious Latin realm in the eastern Mediterranean. He enjoyed an especially close relationship with the papacy – which, barring Venice alone, was the fulcrum of Latin Constantinople’s hopes for survival. The significant Champenois, even Briennois, ‘clusters’ in the Latin empire could well have been particularly enthusiastic about having one of their own as their new suzerain.¹¹⁵ John was even close kin, by marriage, to the imperial house of Courtenay.¹¹⁶ In sum, the chances are that John was, indeed, the best candidate likely to take on this tough though extremely high-ranking posting on the fringes of Latin Christendom.

There may even have been a further telling point in John’s favour. If he became ruler of the Latin empire, he would have the opportunity to work again with Simon of Maugastel, the former archbishop of Tyre. Simon, as we have seen, had been instrumental in the process by which Frederick II had effectively deposed John as king of Jerusalem. Not long afterwards, though, Simon seems to have fallen out with Frederick in his turn; he certainly withdrew from the Hohenstaufen orbit, probably resigning the chancellorship of the kingdom of Jerusalem that Frederick had given him. By 1228–9, in other words, the decks were clear for John to regard Simon as an ‘old friend’ again, after the distressing events of 1225–6.¹¹⁷ It is not quite clear when Simon was raised to the patriarchate of Constantinople, and also to be papal legate, but Mayer has provided evidence to suggest that these events took place before John’s candidacy for the Latin empire

¹¹⁴ Much of this summary is adapted from R. L. Wolff’s old classic ‘The Latin empire of Constantinople’, 213–16, in his *Studies in the Latin Empire of Constantinople*.

¹¹⁵ For these ‘clusters’, see below, 163, 166–7.

¹¹⁶ However, John also seems to have had a significant role in war *against* Robert and Baldwin’s father, Peter, before the latter became Latin emperor (see above, 30–1).

¹¹⁷ Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 356–9.

was even a possibility.¹¹⁸ It was as patriarch of Constantinople that Simon, still in Italy, witnessed the treaty by which John became emperor-elect, in April 1229.¹¹⁹

The process and terms by which John became emperor-elect are very much clearer than those by which he had become king-elect of Jerusalem, twenty years earlier. The main reason for this is that we have transcripts of a variety of *acta* relating to the events of 1228–9, as opposed to almost nothing similar for 1208–9. Above all, we have the text of the actual agreement by which John became emperor-elect, the ‘treaty of Perugia’. All this makes the basic outline of events quite clear. In late 1228 the Latin Constantinopolitan regency government dispatched envoys to the papacy and ‘King’ John, armed with suitable powers to negotiate. As we have already noted, agreement seems to have been reached rather quickly, although a draft version of the deal was amended slightly back in Constantinople. In due course, at Perugia, John sealed his acceptance of the revised terms, and then the whole treaty was formally approved by Pope Gregory, on 9 April 1229.¹²⁰

The terms of the treaty reflect the fact that John was now in a much stronger position, vis-à-vis desperate Latin Constantinople, than he had been two decades earlier, when negotiating for the throne of Jerusalem. He seems to have refused to accept a mere regency for young Baldwin. Instead, it was agreed that John would become sole emperor (not co-emperor, as is still sometimes said). So, considered solely in terms of his title, John was now to rise even higher than the crown of Jerusalem – to a rank that could be presented as equal with his old enemy, Frederick II. Furthermore, by insisting that the treaty spell out in terms that he would reign as sole emperor ‘for his entire life’, John did everything he realistically could to ensure that he would not lose Constantinople in the way that he had lost the kingdom of Jerusalem.

John’s takeover of the imperial crown would put young Baldwin into a rather anomalous position, which the treaty sought to clear up as best it could. John was to be his guardian until the boy was twenty. At that point, Baldwin was to swear an oath to continue to accept John’s rule until John’s death. In return, Baldwin would be invested, straight away, with all the Latin empire’s territory in Asia Minor, with the sole exception of the duchy of Nicomedia. (Very little of this land was in Latin hands at the time of the treaty of Perugia, but, clearly, it was hoped that it would be

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 360–1. ¹¹⁹ *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, no. 273.

¹²⁰ This process is briefly summarised in ‘*Régestes des empereurs latins de Constantinople*’, nos. 168–70, 174–6. The full text of the ‘treaty of Perugia’ can be found in *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, no. 273.

reconquered under John.) Most importantly, Baldwin was, of course, to succeed John as emperor on the latter's death.

The treaty tried to square concern for existing rights with scope for John to advance his family, as well as himself. His daughter Mary, still a toddler, was to marry Baldwin when both were old enough. This neatly mirrored the union previously agreed for Asen's daughter. But, as we shall see, between the mid-1220s and the early 1230s Berengaria gave John a brood of young sons, who also needed to be provided for.¹²¹ The treaty confirmed that John could carve out great lordships for them, but only out of land that was not currently in Western hands, to be held of the Latin emperor. Dowries, too, were stipulated in the treaty for the two future empresses, Berengaria and Mary.¹²²

It was entirely natural for John to begin his drive to raise men and money for Constantinople back in his old homeland, northeastern France. Gregory IX sought to kick-start the process by writing to the archbishop of Reims and his suffragans, urging them to help John. With the 'business of the Holy Land' unfortunately in a sad flux, he said, now was the time to do everything possible to rescue the Latin empire. Gregory emphasised that he would grant, to all those who went with John, the same privileges that they would have had for going on crusade to the Holy Land. In this way, he elevated John's expedition into something akin to a formal crusade.¹²³ Yet it is telling that even Gregory, a pope intensely concerned about the Latin empire, was obliged to frame his appeal for Constantinople in this way – in Holy Land terms. This points to the fundamental problem that would plague John henceforth – one that no Latin emperor was ever able to surmount. Bluntly, rescuing the Latin empire ranked comparatively low among Latin Christendom's collective priorities, certainly far lower than succouring John's former kingdom of Jerusalem.¹²⁴ There may have been an irony here. Earlier, as king of Jerusalem, John could well have insisted on the utter primacy of the Holy Land over other, rival causes, such as the Latin empire. Now, perhaps, he had to backtrack embarrassingly.

John came back to a northern France that was far more unsettled than when he had last been there. His aunt by marriage, the queen mother Blanche of Castile, was struggling to establish her son, the young king Louis IX, in the core position that the monarchy had come to occupy under Philip Augustus and Louis VIII. For his part, the count of Champagne, Theobald IV, had contrived to alienate a powerful group

¹²¹ Below, 164–5. ¹²² *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, no. 273.

¹²³ See the 'Lettre de Grégoire IX concernant l'empire latin de Constantinople', 230–2.

¹²⁴ See below, 178–80.

of oppositionist barons; and in 1229–30, a league of them invaded Champagne in force, headed by figures such as Philip Hurepel, count of Boulogne. The royalists managed to win a respite for Champagne by calling the leaguer barons away for military service to the king in Brittany (where he was facing a revolt, allied to an English invasion). When their stint of service was done, though, the barons simply resumed their war in Champagne. Peace did not come until the end of 1230, at a conference presided over by the teenage King Louis.¹²⁵

John plainly saw it as his task to support both the monarchy and the count of Champagne, in the interests of peace for recruitment for Latin Constantinople. This meant that he assumed a role rather similar to the one that he had previously played in France in the early to mid-1220s. It seems that John accompanied the royal host to Brittany. Certainly, he was with it in May 1230, at Clisson near Nantes.¹²⁶ There, still officially acknowledged as king of Jerusalem, he issued an *actum* along with the archbishop of Sens, the bishop of Chartres and Theobald of Champagne. They confirmed that King Louis had sworn to observe the peace terms that he had recently agreed with that perennial rebel, Hugh X of Lusignan, count of La Marche and Angoulême.¹²⁷ Furthermore, a Norman source, albeit an admittedly rather isolated one, carefully picks out John as the leading figure behind the French throne, bringing about peace between Theobald IV and Philip Hurepel.¹²⁸ Whilst this looks overstated, it is quite believable that John did play a significant role in these negotiations, as a semi-independent, prestigious mediator. In the process, he could well have earned the gratitude of the French crown, as well as of Count Theobald.

However, it is noticeable that John did not manage to recruit the obvious person to accompany him and settle in the Latin empire, namely his own nephew, Count Walter IV of Brienne. Indeed, when Walter *did* move out to the East only a couple of years later, he went not to join his uncle but, instead, to the Holy Land. Yet there is no reason to believe in any great rift between them. Their relationship seems to have been perfectly satisfactory, right up to John's final departure from northeastern France in late 1230. In September Theobald IV had come to Rosnay, on the borders of the county of Brienne. There, he issued an *actum*

¹²⁵ The fullest account of all this is by d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 210–53.

¹²⁶ John's participation in this campaign perhaps finished off any lingering goodwill towards him in England. Maybe this is what Matthew Paris is really referring to in his *Chronica majora*, III, 481.

¹²⁷ Below, Appendix 1, no. 14.

¹²⁸ The *Chronico Sanctae Catharinae de Monte Rotomagi*, in *RHGF*, XXIII, 398.

concerning the possessions that John still held of the count of Champagne. John had earlier entrusted Onjon and Luyères to Walter; now he did the same with some rights he had at nearby Piney.¹²⁹ This looks like a sign of John's continuing confidence in the count of Brienne – misplaced only in the sense that Walter soon emigrated too.

Back in Italy, John passed through Piacenza in January 1231, and then on to Perugia for further consultations with the pope.¹³⁰ He now seems to have wanted Gregory to assist him in arranging transportation for his host, by sea, to Constantinople. It is hardly surprising that John opted for the sea route. He was doubtless aware of the ghastly precedent of the Latin emperor Peter, who had never, in fact, ruled the empire, since he was captured on the road in 1219, and never seen again. Although, a couple of years after that, John's immediate predecessor, Robert, had successfully resuscitated the land route, he had done so, in large measure, through capitalising on Asen's goodwill. Asen could hardly be expected to welcome the man who had supplanted him as projected ruler of the Latin empire, though. Since 1228 Asen's power had expanded alarmingly across the northern Balkans and Thrace. He had destroyed Epirote power at the battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230, so removing the Latin empire's greatest enemy during the previous decade. But the Latins did not benefit as much from this as they should have done, since the newly aggrandised Asen now also stood as an enemy.¹³¹ With the land route thus effectively blocked by Asen, small wonder that John turned to the sea. This too had its dangers, though, besides the obvious natural perils. When he was quite sure that John would go by sea, the anxious Pope Gregory still instructed several eastern European prelates and the nobles of Hungary that, if John were captured en route to his capital, they should hasten at once to rescue him.¹³²

It is equally unsurprising that John turned to Venice, chief partner of the Latin empire, to arrange transportation for his host. In March 1231 he sent Peter of Altomanno as his envoy to the city, equipped with suitable

¹²⁹ This *actum* added that, if John left no children, Walter would inherit all the land that John held of the count of Champagne ('Catalogue', no. 162). In the event, although John *did* leave children who were back in the West by then, Theobald IV himself claimed Onjon, Luyères and another fief in around 1250, after Walter had disappeared in Ayyubid captivity ('Catalogue', no. 176).

¹³⁰ *Annales Placentini Guelfi*, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 18, 450; *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, no. 277.

¹³¹ The classic summary of all this, in English, is probably still Wolff's 'The Latin empire of Constantinople', 212–17. In 1230, it seems, Frederick II sent some troops to his Greek ally in Epiros. Partly, we may guess, this was to turn up the heat on John's journey east. See P. Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean, 1204–1500* (London, 1995), 315.

¹³² Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 657.

powers and letters of accreditation. It seems that Peter was accompanied by a papal legate, Bishop Nicholas of Reggio, who bore further letters from Gregory IX – no doubt urging the Venetians to help John.¹³³ Although the republic would probably have done much to assist him in any case, it was fortunate for John that the doge he had to deal with, not just now but throughout his reign as Latin emperor, was Jacopo (Giacomo) Tiepolo. Tiepolo had made his career in the east: he had twice been his city's *podestà* in Latin Constantinople, as well as the first Venetian duke of Crete. In short, he was particularly committed to, as well as knowledgeable about, the Latin empire.¹³⁴ On 7 April the doge concluded an agreement with Peter. It was ratified by John, and approved by the pope in late May, at Rieti.¹³⁵

This 'treaty of Rieti' cries out for comparison with that of Venice (1201) – 'the most...notorious transport contract in European history', and the root cause behind the foundation of the Latin empire itself a few years later.¹³⁶ The biggest difference is that no direct payment at all was required in 1231. The Venetians were extremely anxious to obtain all possible aid to protect their investment in the Latin empire – and so, henceforth, Venice increasingly felt that it had to offer free transportation. In the terms of the treaty of Rieti, the Venetians got what they really wanted from John anyway: confirmation of all their lands, rights and privileges within the empire. It is worth adding that the contract of 1231 was really rather small beer compared to that of 1201. On presenting himself at Venice, with his host, on 1 August, the emperor-elect and 'king of Jerusalem' would find fourteen galleys, fully manned and equipped, at his disposal for three months, to sail to Constantinople or anywhere else in the vicinity, as agreed by John and the captains. This fleet would transport his army, reckoned in the treaty as 500 knights, 1,200 horses, and 5,000 lesser men. The Venetians would provide food and fodder for the host for the three months. Wisely, after the enormous risks of 1201–4, provision was carefully made to cover what would happen should John default outright, or come to Venice with a much larger or smaller following.¹³⁷

The witness lists of the various versions of the treaty of Rieti provide the only indications we have as to the identities of the principal figures who accompanied John to Constantinople. Although we hear about Peter of

¹³³ *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, no. 277.

¹³⁴ See R. L. Wolff, 'A new document from the period of the Latin empire of Constantinople: the oath of the Venetian Podestà', esp. 560–1, in his *Studies in the Latin Empire of Constantinople*; and D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 1988), 164.

¹³⁵ *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, nos. 277–80. ¹³⁶ Tyerman, *God's War*, 513.

¹³⁷ *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, nos. 277–80.

Altomanno, about the emperor-elect's chaplain (also called John) and about two other clerics, Thomas and Stephen, the name that really stands out is Guy of Traînel, canon of Laon.¹³⁸ The Traînels were an important Champenois family, with a history of involvement in the Latin empire. Garnier of Traînel, bishop of Troyes, had gone east with the Fourth Crusade, and had died in newly Latinised Constantinople in 1205.¹³⁹ Guy's presence amongst John's clerics in 1231 suggests that the emperor-elect's recruitment drive had been rather more successful than we might otherwise have supposed – especially among prominent northeastern French families with existing connections to the Latin empire.

Equally, John's whole host could well have been notably larger than we might guess. The treaty of Rieti indicates the size of the army that was anticipated a bare few months before sailing. Maybe, then, it is reasonably accurate. The Venetians had been careful to stipulate that, shortly before coming to their city, John was to 'notify the lord doge' as to the precise numbers of knights and horses. Unfortunately, we do not know what came of this.¹⁴⁰ But, if the figures in the treaty are even roughly right, then it would seem that John actually took many more knights to Constantinople in 1231 than had accompanied him on his crusade to the Holy Land twenty years earlier.

Once he was confident that the treaty of Rieti would go ahead, Gregory IX wrote to the patriarch Simon, who had preceded John to Constantinople. The pope instructed him to have everything ready for the emperor-elect, who would, at last, be setting off for the city in August.¹⁴¹ Back in July 1230 Gregory had finally made peace with Frederick II, so ending the War of the Keys. In the course of doing so, the pope could well have secretly promised that, once John was compensated with an imperial crown – saving face for the papacy, in other words – the Church would finally recognise Frederick as king of Jerusalem. At any rate, this is what happened. In August 1231, once John was safely on his way to Constantinople, Gregory wrote to Frederick, addressing him for the first time by his full title: 'Romanorum imperatori, semper augusto, Jerusalem et Sicilie regi'.¹⁴² With this letter, the door was fittingly, if belatedly, closed on the 'Jerusalem' phase of John's life, which had spanned more than two decades. What remained for him now was the Latin empire.

¹³⁸ Ibid. ¹³⁹ J. Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 13–15.

¹⁴⁰ *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, nos. 277, 279.

¹⁴¹ Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 656. ¹⁴² Ibid., no. 700.

John's reign at Constantinople, from 1231 to 1237, marks him out as unique. By ruling as Latin emperor, having earlier been king of Jerusalem, he became the only individual who ever wore both of these, the highest-ranking and most prestigious crowns in the Latin East (albeit consecutively, not simultaneously).

The grand narrative of John's reign as emperor may be neatly summarised as a passage from hope through to disillusionment. In the end, he left Latin Constantinople in a worse state than that in which he had found it. It is therefore well worth asking how far John was responsible for this. Contemporaries did note certain key failings in the emperor – though some also suggest that he redeemed himself and his reign through his personal heroism in 1235–6. (During those years, as we shall see, he led the successful defence of the city against a massive, combined Nicaean–Vlach–Bulgar assault and siege – undoubtedly the defining event of his reign.)¹ In this chapter, in fact, this 'standard approach' towards much of the above is questioned. In truth, the mere survival of Latin Constantinople was something of an achievement under the circumstances. Ultimately, John had been chosen as emperor to keep the city out of the hands both of dangerous 'friends' (such as the Vlach–Bulgar ruler, John Asen) and of great enemies (such as the rival 'Nicaean' emperor, John Vatatzes). In the end, our John succeeded in this, just. Victory over both these adversaries together, in 1235–6, kept Constantinople Latin – as it proved, for another generation.

John's reign can all too easily appear as a void, with a massive assault and siege wedged into the middle. In the pages that follow, as back in Chapter 2, we are seeking to make sense of what could be called a 'black hole' period, in this case to offer a coherent reading of John's rule in Constantinople as a whole, despite the obvious limitations on our knowledge. What little evidence we have can work best for us if it is supplemented with telling

¹ Below, 174–7.

comparisons wherever appropriate. The most obvious of these is, naturally, with John's earlier reign as king of Jerusalem, when the same man had been faced with a range of similar problems.

The main difficulty of studying the Latin empire is the extreme paucity of the surviving source material. During John's reign, we can barely see Latin Constantinople from the inside at all. A handful of papal letters stand out, as often the best contemporary official documentation that we have. Turning to narrative accounts, pride of place would belong to the hostile Nicaean historian George Akropolites. As we have already seen, Akropolites saw John with his own eyes, in Constantinople in the early 1230s, when the future chronicler was yet quite young.² But Akropolites skims very lightly over the main event of John's reign, the massive assault and siege of 1235–6.³ *Faute de mieux*, we are obliged to fall back on a range of thirteenth-century accounts from much further afield, all of which have their own reasons for suddenly taking an interest in the vicissitudes of the Latin empire. Amongst them, Colbert-Fontainebleau offers a brief but particularly valuable corroborative to Akropolites on John's abortive campaign across the Dardanelles in 1233. It is unfortunate that our main source for the fighting at Constantinople in 1235 has to be the sometimes painful verse of the *Rhyming Chronicle*, by the Flemish cleric, and later bishop, Philip Mouskes (d. 1282). In addition, the Champenois Aubry of Troisfontaines is, rather unexpectedly, useful on the renewed siege of 1236. All in all, though, the situation is well summed up by a simple observation. In so far as we know, not a single text issued by John as emperor, or addressed to him as such, has survived.

Nevertheless, we can discern the contents of at least one document issued by the emperor. It has long been noted that there is a close concordance between Mouskes' account of John's heroism in 1235 and a letter of Gregory IX's written that same year (that is, only a bare few months after the events described). From this, it is easy to conclude that the two are independently substantiating one another. However, there is reason to believe that Mouskes' account is largely derived from the pope's, even though the Flemish chronicler does seem to have added a few extra touches of his own. We know that transcripts of Gregory's letter were dispatched to northeastern France, where Mouskes was later based.⁴ If it is right that Mouskes' narrative is based on Gregory's letter, the key question becomes: where, then, did Gregory get his information from? The answer to this is pretty clear: from an appeal that does not survive,

² Above, 25, 29–30.

³ See Akropolites, *The History*, ch. 33, and the introduction by Macrides, 89.

⁴ Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, nos. 2877–9.

sent by John himself to the pope.⁵ It looks, therefore, as though *both* main surviving accounts of John's heroism stem from the Latin emperor's own version of events. The conclusions from this are twofold: we need a larger pinch of salt when looking at Gregory IX and Mouskes; and we should not be so quick to subscribe to the persuasive notion that John justified his (rather disappointing) reign essentially through 'a miracle' – his own personal heroism in 1235.⁶

Ruling the empire

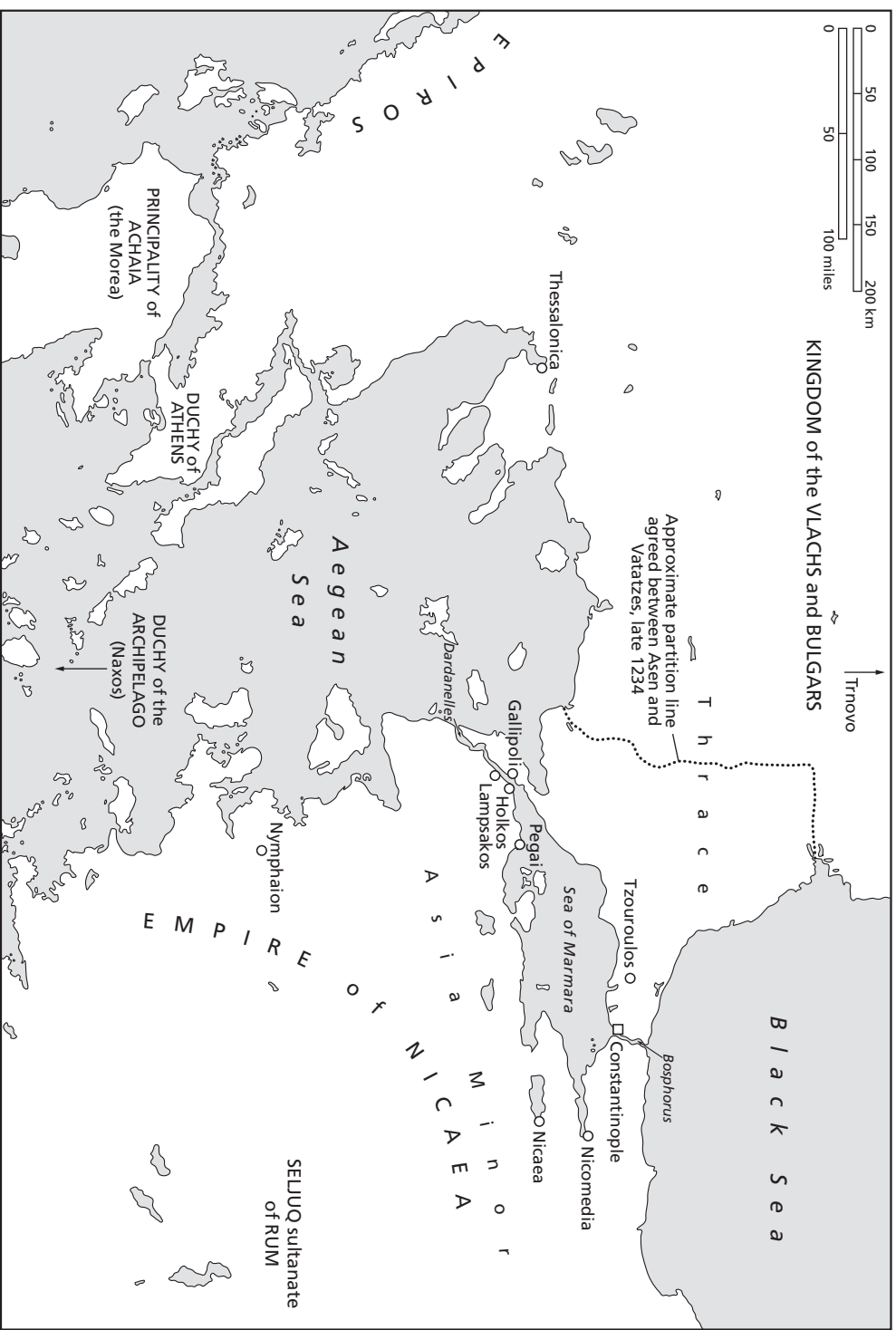
The Latin emperor presided over a quite remarkable polity, distinctive to the point of being bizarre. The Latin empire had been founded following the diversion of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople: a mainly 'Frankish/French' and Venetian army of crusaders had captured and sacked the city in 1204. Yet their mission, to create a Latin replacement for the former Byzantine Empire, was in serious trouble almost from the very start. The fledgling Latin empire was threatened not only by rival Greek successor states to Byzantium (the 'Empire of Nicaea' had emerged as far and away the strongest of these by the time that John's reign actually began) but also by a resurgent Vlach–Bulgar kingdom. A substantial part of the Latin empire's oddness stemmed from the fact that, by 1230, although some outlying regions of the empire were viable or even flourishing, the imperial centre itself had already 'degenerated into a bankrupt husk'.⁷ This was a situation not easily fixed. Although the Latin Constantinopolitan elites had shown a degree of flexibility in revising their political structure to permit John's takeover, nevertheless the new emperor was obliged to rule within the agreed framework, above all as expressed in the treaties of Perugia and Rieti. This meant that possibilities and opportunities still potentially available to an adventurous Latin newcomer in, say, southern Greece or the islands of the Aegean simply did not apply in the imperial capital.

These two treaties prescribed, amongst other things, the precise proportion of the empire that John was to rule directly. In truth, that meant only parts of Constantinople itself, and the city's immediate hinterland. Ever since the founding of the Latin empire, only a quarter of a century beforehand, imperial authority had been very notably curtailed even within the

⁵ Its contents can be gleaned from Gregory's response in *ibid.*, II, nos. 2872–9.

⁶ The classic expression of this view can be found in J. Longnon, *L'empire latin de Constantinople et la principauté de Morée* (Paris, 1949), 174.

⁷ Adapted from Tyerman, *God's War*, 556.



Map 5 The Bosphorus region and beyond during John's reign as Latin emperor

capital itself, above all by a massively expanded quarter along the Golden Horn, and a shower of exemptions, rights and privileges formally ceded in perpetuity to the Latin empire's imperial partner, Venice. Markedly smaller concessions had also been made to various other Italian mercantile communities, as well as, of course, to the Latin Church (which, as we have seen, was headed in the early 1230s by John's old friend, Simon of Maugastel). There are obvious parallels here with the kingdom of Jerusalem, but one key difference stands out. The Latin emperors had started out in a much weaker position than the early kings of Jerusalem had quickly achieved in their realm; and the emperors' position had deteriorated much more sharply from this bad start. The swift reduction of direct imperial control to the area outlined above neatly reflects the circumstances of decay, defeat and even despair that had swept over Latin Constantinople during the Emperor Robert's reign in the 1220s.

It is unsurprising, then, that the imperial finances were in serious trouble well before John became emperor. For various reasons, the Latins proved themselves quite incapable of reinvigorating Constantinople to its former Byzantine 'Comnenian' glory. Nonetheless, the city was by no means finished as a commercial hub. This is quite clear from the determination of the leading Italian mercantile cities to secure as good a position as they could there. The real problem was that only a limited proportion of the wealth that was generated in, or passed through, Constantinople was channelled into the emperor's hands; moreover, this was a situation that he lacked the power to alter. From this limited resource base, though, he bore what was arguably the main brunt of defending the empire. The capital and the adjoining territories directly ruled by the emperor were often the chief enemy targets, and this meant that they had to cope with the strains and devastation of recurrent warfare. Furthermore, because it was rare for the emperors to win very much, either in the way of land or spoils, they found it even more difficult than it would otherwise have been to attract the fighters and settlers necessary to reverse this draining cycle of decline. Yet this was precisely the task that John had now set himself to achieve.

Constantinople's situation, during and just after John's reign, is perhaps best revealed by two surviving descriptions. When looking at them, we must, of course, make allowance for hyperbole. But, even so, the amount they have in common with each other, and with certain other sources, is striking. A quartet of friars wrote the following in 1234, just before the situation became critical with the assault and siege of the capital:

The land of Constantinople was as if devoid of all protection. The lord emperor John was a pauper. All the paid knights [had] departed. The ships of the Venetians, Pisans, Anconitans and of other *nationes* were ready to leave, and some, indeed,

had already done so. Considering, then, [this] abandoned land, we feared danger because it was surrounded by enemies.⁸

By contrast, the *De susceptione coronae spinae* was composed in faraway France. It offers, if anything, an even more frightening vision of Constantinople a few years later, when the Latin elites there had been driven to the point of pawning their most precious relic, the holy Crown of Thorns.⁹ Constantinople, says the *De susceptione*, was still effectively under siege, right up to its very walls. There were serious food shortages within; and many people were fleeing by night or ‘by furtive means’, certain that the city would soon fall.¹⁰

Such sources are particularly noteworthy in the light of various accusations in Mouskes’ *Rhyming Chronicle* and in Colbert–Fontainebleau. These narratives cumulatively suggest that John’s lethargy and avarice led to an appalling number of desertions from the Latin forces in Constantinople, something that the empire could barely have afforded even at the best of times.¹¹ It is not surprising, though, that Mouskes and Colbert–Fontainebleau hold the new emperor responsible for the desertions. After his arrival at Constantinople and coronation in Hagia Sophia in autumn 1231, John plainly decided against an immediate attack on his main enemy, the Nicaean emperor Vatatzes, who was ready and waiting for such a move by the Latins. This kind of caution would, in the end, lead Aubry of Troisfontaines to damn John’s efforts to recover land from the Greeks as ‘tepide’ – lukewarm.¹² The lack of an immediate war to fight may well have meant that a great many, perhaps the majority, of those who had accompanied John to Constantinople soon returned home in disappointment. In no way can this haemorrhaging of forces be called a good outcome, but it was certainly better than a major defeat at Vatatzes’ hands. In his moment of greatest insight, even the disparaging Mouskes is obliged to admit that John could make ‘neither war nor peace’.¹³ In truth, throughout his reign, John was trying to stockpile money and *matériel*

⁸ This passage can be found conveniently printed in Wolff, ‘The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans’, 227, in his *Studies in the Latin Empire of Constantinople*. Wolff, in turn, found it in *Disputatio Latinorum et Graecorum seu relatio apocrisariorum Gregorii IX de gestis Nicaeae in Bythynia et Nymphaeae in Lydia, 1234*, ed. H. Golubovich, in *Archivum Franciscanum historicum* 12 (1919), 446.

⁹ For the date of the pawning of the Crown of Thorns, see esp. ‘Régestes des empereurs latins’, nos. 191–3. At the end of no. 191, it is wrongly stated that John died in March 1238, when actually this had occurred a year earlier.

¹⁰ Archbishop Walter of Sens, *De susceptione coronae spinae Jesu Christi*, in *RHGF*, XXII, 28–9.

¹¹ Philip Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, ed. F. de Reiffenberg, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1836–45), II, 613, 620–1; Colbert–Fontainebleau, 382.

¹² Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 933. ¹³ Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 613.

without losing the services of the paid soldiery on which he and his city depended. It was always bound to be very difficult to square this circle.

We can know only a very little about John's relations with the Latin Constantinopolitan barons who had invited him in, and now propped him up as emperor. Perhaps John inclined particularly towards the loose 'Champenois cluster' within the empire. The best – almost the *only* – way into these questions is to employ the same method as was used earlier vis-à-vis the kingdom of Jerusalem: to examine which barons held crown offices during John's reign. Let us leave aside the post of seneschal, to which we will return in a moment. We know that, soon after John's death, the constable and marshal of the empire were Geoffrey of Méry and Vilain of Aulnay, respectively. We might guess, then, that they had also been in office under John.¹⁴ Vilain, at least, was clearly a part of the Champenois cluster (Aulnay itself is not far from Vitry, in Champagne). Vilain could number two marshals of Champagne amongst his close family, and his uncle and namesake had followed Count Henry II of Champagne to the Holy Land, and remained there after Henry's death. In addition, the Aulnays could well have been closely related to the Villehardouins, to whom we will return shortly.¹⁵ Our Vilain had also been the 'common feature' of *both* sets of Latin Constantinopolitan envoys sent out to John in 1228–9 to negotiate his future rule over the empire.¹⁶ It is possible that, over the course of this period, Vilain had forged a close understanding with John (that is, before the latter had even become emperor). If this is right, then it may well mirror the relationship, twenty years earlier, between John and the Jerusalemite emissary Aimar of Layron – who was, after all, another Champenois.

Although the imperial crown offices were essentially Westernised, there were also a number of survivals from Byzantine court usage. Before John's accession, the honorific 'Caesar' had been borne by Narjot of Toucy, *bailli* or regent of the empire, under whom it had been agreed that John would become emperor.¹⁷ There does seem to have been some trouble between the new emperor and Narjot, and perhaps this echoes what had happened two decades earlier between John, as king of Jerusalem, and John of Ibelin. It is quite believable that Narjot, like the Ibelins before him, wanted to be the 'power behind the throne' during the reign of the newcomer, John of Brienne. Perhaps the resulting tensions led Narjot to retire quite

¹⁴ B. Hendrickx, 'Les institutions de l'empire latin de Constantinople: la cour et les dignitaires', *Byzantina* 9 (1977), 198–203.

¹⁵ Longnon, *Recherches sur la vie de Geoffroy de Villehardouin*, 15–16, 43–4.

¹⁶ See the summary in 'Régestes des empereurs latins', nos. 168–70.

¹⁷ Hendrickx, 'Les institutions de l'empire latin: la cour', 208–9; 'Régestes des empereurs latins', nos. 168–70, 174–6.

swiftly from the new emperor's 'inner circle', giving place to the likes of Vilain of Aulnay and Anseau of Cayeux.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that, on John's death in 1237, the new regent was not (as might have been expected) the experienced Narjot again but, instead, Anseau. Now that John was off the scene, though, Narjot – again like the Ibelins – was able to climb back into the saddle relatively quickly. He had replaced Anseau as *bailli* by the end of 1238.¹⁹

However, there is no real evidence for trouble between John and his ward and successor, Baldwin – the standout baron in the empire, with whom the potential for a fraught relationship certainly existed. As the treaty of Perugia had stipulated, Baldwin and John's daughter Mary were married, certainly before Baldwin sailed for the West. Baldwin's journey to the West, which seems to have begun in late 1236, was clearly a generally agreed policy.²⁰ John, it will be recalled, had been the first king of Jerusalem to go to the West in person. It made sense for the emperor to remain at his post in Constantinople, whilst the young heir went to the West, to visit his powerful relatives there for the first time, and to raise as much men, money and *matériel* as he could. Moreover, John's three 'very young' sons went with him.²¹ The emperor, and his wife Berengaria, never saw them again.

It is ironic that John sired only surviving sons through the wife who did not bring with her a fair chance of a line of Brienne kings. All three were born in the late 1220s and early 1230s, in the following order, it seems: Alfonso, Louis, John. The first two names flaunt their intimate family relationship with the royal houses of Castile-León and France. When the boys went to the West, it was plainly hoped to entrust them to those kings – above all, to Louis IX. William of Nangis writes that the Emperor John 'asked King Louis...and his pious mother Queen Blanche, whose great-nephews they were, to have and receive [his sons] as *clientes*'. John got his wish. The boys were 'honourably and graciously received and dearly loved' by the future saint, who raised them 'very high'.²² The young Briennes thus became classic examples of a contemporary phenomenon: 'alien' close kinsmen of the ruler, lifted by him into

¹⁸ See also below, 167.

¹⁹ B. Hendrickx, 'Les institutions de l'empire latin de Constantinople: le pouvoir impérial', *Byzantina* 6 (1974), 140; 'Régestes des empereurs latins', nos. 187, 192, 195.

²⁰ We can infer that Baldwin arrived at the papal Curia in late 1236, to judge from a small flurry of *acta* issued then for the Latin empire, including one specifically concerned with Baldwin himself. See Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, nos. 3395–7; see also the *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, ed. E. Martène and U. Durand, 5 vols. (Paris, 1717), I, cols. 998–9.

²¹ See William of Nangis, *Chronicon*, in *RHGF*, XX, 550, who certainly gives the wrong date for this.

²² *Ibid.*

exalted positions in his realm, to some extent to the detriment of the more established nobility there.²³ Two of the brothers received crown offices in France. Alfonso was appointed chamberlain, and the younger John of Brienne became butler. All three made fine marriages. In this way, Alfonso founded a line of Brienne counts of Eu (and later of Guînes, too) that continued until the last was dramatically executed in 1350.²⁴ Moreover, in the late 1270s and early 1280s the younger John even governed Champagne on behalf of Jeanne of Navarre, the future queen of France.²⁵ The brothers also developed their interests in Spain, forming a close relationship with the new king of Castile and León, Alfonso X ‘the Wise’. They witnessed many documents for him from the 1250s to the 1270s. Unsurprisingly, they carved out something of a niche for themselves, as particularly useful in the sphere of Franco-Iberian relations. In the event, they never returned to the Latin empire, to try to claim the great lordships that had once been promised to them in the treaty of Perugia. But they did have much to do with their sister, the distressed and much-travelled Empress Mary – a connection that persisted after the loss of Constantinople in 1261. Mary’s descent from the royal house of Castile-León was surely one of the main reasons why Alfonso X briefly emerged as the chief protector of Latin Constantinople at the very end of its life, in the middle of the thirteenth century.²⁶

Arguably, though, the key relationship for all Latin emperors was with their imperial partner in Constantinople, Venice. The basics for this relationship, under John, had been set out in the treaty of Rieti: the emperor-elect had been obliged to endorse all the republic’s lands, rights and privileges within the empire. Venice was clearly taking no chances. The treaty bound John to reconfirm all of the above within eight days of becoming emperor, ‘at the request of the lord doge or of Venetian envoys’.²⁷ However, Colbert-Fontainebleau reveals what we could otherwise have guessed: that a significant breach soon opened, nonetheless, between the new emperor and the republic. The wider context makes this readily explicable. At the time, in the early 1230s, Venice was facing a

²³ For the best discussion of the issue of ‘aliens’ in a thirteenth-century context, see N. Vincent, *Peter des Roches: An Alien in English Politics, 1205–1238* (Cambridge, 2002).

²⁴ For this quite remarkable event, see S. H. Cuttler, *The Law of Treason and Treason Trials in Later Medieval France* (Cambridge, 1981), 154.

²⁵ See d’Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, IV, part 1, 449–52.

²⁶ The bulk of this paragraph is derived from Wolff, ‘Mortgage and redemption of an emperor’s son’, 76. But much of what Wolff says should be treated with caution; see esp. ‘*Régestes des empereurs latins*’, nos. 261, 271. I hope to examine the lives of John’s sons in more detail in the near future.

²⁷ *Urkunden der Republik Venedig*, II, nos. 277, 279.

serious Greek uprising on its prize possession in the empire apart from its quarter in Constantinople: the island of Crete. This revolt had substantial backing from John's imperial rival, Vatatzes.²⁸ It is no surprise, then, that the Venetians were so determined that John had to attack Vatatzes as soon as possible. But, as we have seen, John declined to do this until Vatatzes was more heavily engaged elsewhere.²⁹

Although the emperor's rule was now more or less confined to Constantinople and its environs, the empire as a whole had not shrunk to this level. In fact, Latin Constantinople and Thessalonica (the latter lost in 1224) had acted rather like shock absorbers – attracting the interest of, and taking the heaviest blows from, enemy powers. In this way, they may well have contributed substantially to the consolidation of various Latin imperial vassal states further to the south and west.³⁰ By the 1230s the leading ones – Achaia, Athens and the Archipelago (Naxos) – looked notably healthier than the capital itself. The rulers of these states still acknowledged the Latin emperor's suzerainty, to some degree at least; and all recognised a common interest in succouring the imperial centre if it stood in serious danger. In short, being *in extremis* could bring allies with it.

For the Latin emperors, the most important of these relationships was surely with the Villehardouin princes of Achaia (or the Morea). The emperors had long seen the advantage of binding the Villehardouins to themselves at a high level, so they had formally acknowledged the Villehardouins' princely title. They had granted the princes the largely honorific office of 'seneschal of the empire' (which the princes bore proudly, but which underlined, with particular clarity, the theme of service due to the emperor). A marriage alliance had followed, in 1217, linking the imperial house of Courtenay to the future prince, Geoffrey II.³¹ As emperor, John was perhaps in an unusually good position to pursue this kind of policy, since the Villehardouins were of Champenois – indeed, of Briennois – origin.³² It may well be right that, from the very start of John's reign, Geoffrey II supplied him with an annuity, said to be worth some 22,000 *hyperpyra*, 'ad conducendos auxilarios'.³³ As we shall see, in 1236 the prince would do even more for his lord the emperor, and for Latin Constantinople.³⁴ But, amongst the Latin emperor's 'Frankish' vassals, Geoffrey does seem to have been alone in furnishing aid on such a scale.

²⁸ See Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 171–2. ²⁹ Above, 162–3.

³⁰ Paraphrasing Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean*, 35–6.

³¹ See esp. the summary in *ibid.*, 88–9; and Hendrickx, 'Les institutions de l'empire latin: la cour', 197.

³² Above, 21. ³³ As is said by Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 939. ³⁴ Below, 176.

This, then, may well be a sign of the principality's emergence as the leading Latin power in the Aegean, except only for Venice itself.³⁵

The Church and the campaign of 1233

The Church in the Latin empire was headed by John's old friend, the patriarch and papal legate Simon of Maugastel. Presumably, it was hoped that the new emperor and Simon would work together for some time. But, in the event, this arrangement did not last long. Simon died in early 1233.³⁶ There is evidence, though, that he and John had been close during the previous couple of years – possibly too close for the liking of the former *bailli*, Narjot of Toucy. It is notable that, within a year or so of Simon's death, Narjot received a special concession, almost the 'privilege of kings', from Gregory IX (and possibly Narjot had been lobbying for this concession for some time). No cleric was permitted to excommunicate Narjot, or promulgate a sentence of interdict over his land – without, we may infer, a personal hearing from the pope himself.³⁷ Perhaps we may see in this a hangover from Narjot's earlier difficulties with the new emperor, John, and with the latter's spiritual sidekick, the now deceased Patriarch Simon.

The most interesting aspect of Simon's appointment as patriarch is simply that he was not a Venetian. So Simon's elevation had broken Venice's uncanonical hold over the Latin patriarchate, which dated back to the foundation of the Latin empire in 1204.³⁸ Now that the institution was no longer a Venetian monopoly, the papacy had seen fit to strengthen it by making Simon papal legate, and legatine authority was to be conferred on his successors too.³⁹ Of the events that we know about that took place during Simon's patriarchate, a rather high proportion seem to indicate continuing tensions between Venetians and non-Venetians in the Latin Church at Constantinople.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most telling of these comes around the very end of Simon's life: the matter of the thirty-two 'Frankish-French' conventual churches, which had a significant role to

³⁵ Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean*, 89.

³⁶ See Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 364–5.

³⁷ Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 1746.

³⁸ For this, see Wolff, 'Politics in the Latin patriarchate of Constantinople, 1204–1261', 227–85, in his *Studies in the Latin Empire of Constantinople*.

³⁹ Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 360–1; Wolff, 'Politics in the Latin patriarchate of Constantinople', 289–92.

⁴⁰ For a brief summary of Simon's patriarchate, see Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 360–5; and Wolff, 'Politics in the Latin patriarchate of Constantinople', 286–8.

play in patriarchal elections. Since 1222 presentation to these churches had been an imperial prerogative, sanctioned by the pope. On 14 March 1233 Gregory IX moved to 'correct' this, decreeing that the emperor's appointees had to be ejected, and that the patriarch should fill the resulting vacancies.⁴¹ Wolff is surely right to note that the papacy had held off from granting such powers to the patriarch until Venice's hold over that position had been broken, for, by the new arrangement, a Venetian patriarch could potentially have packed these churches with his own fellow citizens. Under these circumstances, with 'a strongly Venetian cathedral chapter [and a] solidly Venetian group of [conventual churches], it is clear that all future [canonically elected] patriarchs would have been Venetian. Disputed elections would not have taken place, and [so the papacy] could no longer have retained what [had become], in effect, the privilege of appointing the Latin patriarch.'⁴²

Just such a dispute may well have broken out after Simon's death – presumably, as Venice pulled out all the stops to recover the patriarchate. The office stood vacant for more than a year before the next incumbent. The new patriarch, like Simon, was plainly another papal appointee. He was Nicholas of Castell'Arquato, vice-chancellor of the duchy of Spoleto in the Papal State. Not, of course, a Venetian, Nicholas hailed from the prominent della Porta family of Piacenza.⁴³ He was quickly made legate too, as Simon had been before him.⁴⁴ Early in Nicholas's long patriarchate, Gregory IX called upon the prelates of Achaia to provide him with essential financial support. This was 'only the first [in] a series of appeals to the churches of . . . wealthy and comparatively secure [Achaia] for aid to the stricken patriarchate'.⁴⁵ There is something fitting in the fact that the appeal was made in 1236, the very same year that the prince of Achaia likewise came to the rescue of his own beleaguered 'superior' in Constantinople, the Emperor John.

The most dynamic element of the Latin Church in the empire at this time was certainly the new mendicant orders. Back in 1228 the Dominicans had officially constituted their province of 'Romania' (as the Latin empire was known). The first members of the order to arrive in the new province did so during John's reign. Their main church was close to the emperor's chief palace, in the northwestern suburb of

⁴¹ Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 1184.

⁴² See Wolff, 'Politics in the Latin patriarchate of Constantinople', 288; and Mayer, *Die Kanzlei der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, I, 362–4.

⁴³ Wolff, 'Politics in the Latin patriarchate of Constantinople', 289.

⁴⁴ Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 2049.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, no. 3382; Wolff, 'Politics in the Latin patriarchate of Constantinople', 290.

Blachernae.⁴⁶ Just as the Franciscans had established themselves in the Holy Land during John's rule there, so now the Dominicans did something similar whilst he reigned at Constantinople. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, by the time he became emperor, John was an ardent supporter of the mendicant mission and way of life.

His personal affections seem to have remained specially reserved for the Franciscan Order, though. Although the Franciscans had been firmly established at Constantinople since 1220 at the latest, their 'influence. . .at the [Latin] imperial court begins with. . .John'.⁴⁷ The emperor may have had a Franciscan, Angelo, as his private confessor. Perhaps he was also close to the deeply charismatic Benedict of Arezzo, the provincial minister for Franciscan 'Romania' during John's reign.⁴⁸ It has even been suggested that the emperor was somehow involved in the decoration of the Church of the Kyriotissa in Constantinople, which in his day belonged to the Franciscans. There are still fragments of marvellous frescoes in the church, depicting the life of Francis: some of the earliest known images of this most Catholic of saints, emanating from the heart of the Orthodox world.⁴⁹

Mendicants also played a leading role in efforts to secure Church reunion in the early 1230s, and, connected to that, to arrange a one-year truce between John and Vatatzes in 1234. This brings in the crucial issue of papal attitude, and policy, towards the Latin empire. Ideally, the papacy was looking to support the empire, which had established papal supremacy – Church reunion on Rome's terms – over the Church at Constantinople. Moreover, popes generally did their utmost to send in powerful Western aid (John himself was the best that they had been able to achieve in 1228–31). By then, though, it was quite clear that the empire was already in serious trouble, perhaps on the verge of falling. The papacy's ecclesiastical negotiations with the empire's enemies had an ultimately spiritual aim: to achieve their reunion with the Roman Church. But these negotiations could also be used, in a variety of ways, to reduce the pressure on Latin Constantinople; and Eastern Christian leaders were often ready to discuss Church reunion, at the very least. The key question, though, was this: how far were the various Orthodox powers prepared to accept papal primacy, and what, precisely, would they get in return? What Vatatzes, for one, really wanted was 'an easier path to Constantinople': a blind eye to Greek

⁴⁶ See C. A. Frazee, 'The Catholic Church in Constantinople, 1204–1453', *Balkan Studies* 19 (1978), 38; see also Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, no. 4206.

⁴⁷ Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 214.

⁴⁸ See Bernard of Besse, *Liber de laudibus beati Francisci*, in *Analecta Franciscana*, III, 681; and Salimbene, *Cronica*, I, 63.

⁴⁹ See Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean*, 231.

reoccupation of the city, as the price of Church unity.⁵⁰ Alarming for the Latin emperors, the papacy would become increasingly willing to countenance this kind of solution, which would mean sacrificing the Latin empire on the altar of ecclesiastical reunion. In short, the main elements of the popes' two-pronged policy did not always mesh easily together. There was a lurking threat to the Latin emperors in the discussions for Church reunion, born of the fact that the popes were not absolutely committed to the Latin empire. As a result, there was an obvious limit to how successful John would have wanted such talks, between Rome and Vatatzes, to be. For his part, Vatatzes had to be careful not to compromise his Church too far – not least because his 'Nicaean' patriarch was becoming increasingly recognised, in the wider Orthodox world, as the true oecumenical patriarch (i.e. of Constantinople, the 'first amongst equals' in the Orthodox Church).⁵¹

We can see how some of this played out in practice when we look at the twists and turns of the rump Greek power of Thessalonica in the early 1230s. Its ruler, Manuel Angelus, rightly lived in fear of Asen in the northern Balkans; but he could well have had suspicions about Vatatzes too (his now much greater Greek imperial rival). Manuel was surely seeking a way through this when he turned to the Latins and the papacy, perhaps following exaggerated rumour of the size of the host that John was bringing to Constantinople in 1231. The next year John and the patriarch-legate Simon were required by the pope to investigate the reality of Manuel's professed devotion to the Roman Church.⁵² However, by that stage Manuel was also using communion with the 'Nicaean' Church as a channel for dialogue and leverage with Vatatzes.⁵³ What we have here, then, is a certain ecclesiastical fluidity, as Manuel wriggled between Rome and Nicaea – a strategy also practised, at a much deeper level, by Asen himself.

The main reason why John left Constantinople in a worse state than he found it is the damage done by the Vatatzes–Asen alliance in 1235–6. But John cannot really be held responsible for their compact, even though it crystallised during his reign. It had been on the cards ever since 1228–9, when the Latin Constantinopolitan elites had torn up their settlement with Asen, and – in the event – replaced him with John. Asen was consequently alienated from the Latins. Hence it did not help them that, in the aftermath

⁵⁰ See M. Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile: Government and Society under the Laskarids of Nicaea, 1204–1261* (Oxford, 1975), 14; and Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean*, 64.

⁵¹ See esp. M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081–1261* (Cambridge, 1995), 533–8.

⁵² Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, no. 786.

⁵³ Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 537.

of their rupture with him, he destroyed Epirote power at Klokotnitsa, and so expanded Vlach–Bulgarian rule far and wide across the northern Balkans and Thrace. All this, it should be remembered, occurred prior to John taking up rule at Constantinople. Indeed, it was just before the start of John's reign that Asen famously boasted, in an inscription on a column in his capital, Trnovo, that the Latins of Constantinople retained their lands only because of his assent.⁵⁴

The early 1230s brought ominous signs that Asen was turning back to Orthodoxy, and towards an alliance with Vatatzes.⁵⁵ Such a partnership, between their two mighty neighbours on either side, could well be the 'writing on the wall' for the Latins of Constantinople, sandwiched in between. The Latins surely tried to break up the incipient alliance. Their best hope, plainly, was to win back Asen, and little-known sources may show that they did indeed attempt this. If Tarnanidis is right, Asen was looking, in the early 1230s, to boost the standing of his own archbishopric of Trnovo by acquiring the relics of St Parascheva. The remains of this Byzantine saint were kept in a village within the borders of the Latin empire, but the Westerners seem to have thought comparatively little of her. Asen's interest in Parascheva may well be understood as a mark of increasing Orthodoxy, and hence as anti-Latin. But the desperate elites in Constantinople could well have preferred to interpret Asen's ambitions for Trnovo as symptomatic of his desire to stand as independently as possible from Vatatzes and *his* Church. The Greek metropolitan, Matthew of Myreon, stated that Asen had to threaten the Latins until they surrendered the relics. By contrast, the patriarch Efthimis suggested a far more trouble-free process: the Latins simply handed them over, in return for rich rewards.⁵⁶ Might we see in this an attempt by the Latins to placate Asen, and to gain as much as they could in the process – using relics as their main diplomatic currency, since they now had so few others?⁵⁷

⁵⁴ A classic summary of all this, in English, is provided by Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople', 215–17.

⁵⁵ The relevant principal sources, and analyses of them, can be found listed by J. S. Langdon, 'The forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian assault and siege of Constantinople, 1235–1236, and the breakup of the entente cordiale between John III Ducas Vatatzes and John Asen II in 1236 as background to the genesis of the Hohenstaufen–Vatatzes alliance of 1242', in S. Vryonis Jr, ed., *Byzantina kai Metabyzantina*, vol. IV, *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton V. Anastos* (Malibu, 1985), 123–4 n. 5; but see also Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 535.

⁵⁶ See I. Tarnanidis, 'Byzantine–Bulgarian ecclesiastical relations during the reigns of Ioannis Vatatzis and Ivan Asen II, up to the year 1235', *Cyrrillomethodianum* 3 (1975), esp. 34–5, 48–52.

⁵⁷ Parascheva's relics are today on display in the cathedral of Iași, in modern-day Romania.

We have already noted that, in the immediate aftermath of John's arrival at Constantinople in 1231, the new emperor was reluctant to attack Vatatzes. The subsequent 'waiting period' witnessed the opening of a new round of talks on Church reunion between the papacy and Nicaea. The mendicant orders, for the first time, played a leading part in this, largely because the Orthodox warmed to their way of life. But the start of this dialogue did not prevent the Latins, under John, from finally opening hostilities when the opportunity arose, in 1233. In that year Vatatzes sought to put an end to the troublesome semi-independence of Rhodes.⁵⁸ He dispatched a fleet to the island and headed south in person. Langdon has suggested that, since, at this juncture, the Nicaeans were also involved in supporting rebels against Venice on Crete, a major third front could well have pushed their resources to breaking point.⁵⁹ It was plainly the right moment, then, for John to attack Vatatzes' lightly defended positions across the Dardanelles – above all, to try to seize the threatening Nicaean forward base at Lampsakos-Holkos.⁶⁰ Hendrickx has noted that the Latins' weaknesses, in military intelligence and scouting, often cost them dear.⁶¹ After John landed at Lampsakos-Holkos, therefore, he may well have possessed insufficient information to realise just how limited the land forces were that Vatatzes was able to muster quickly against him. With characteristic caution, then, John stuck to the coastline – protected, and with his line of retreat secured, by his (Venetian?) fleet. It would seem that consequently, as Akropolites said, Vatatzes was able to 'hinder the movements of the enemy' rather effectively, even though he had comparatively few troops available.⁶²

Akropolites laconically summed up John's three- or four-month campaign as follows: '[The Latins] had achieved little, or nothing, as we said.'⁶³ Little, certainly; but not nothing. Vatatzes' base at Lampsakos-Holkos had presumably been captured, along with the important port of Pegai (although Akropolites and Colbert-Fontainebleau agree that the port had been taken 'by stealth' rather than by force).⁶⁴ John could well have left a garrison at Pegai – an irritating thorn, perhaps, in Vatatzes' side for more than a year to come.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ See Akropolites, *The History*, ch. 28, and the commentary on it by Macrides.

⁵⁹ J. S. Langdon, *Byzantium's Last Imperial Offensive in Asia Minor* (New York, 1992), 38.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶¹ B. Hendrickx, 'Les institutions de l'empire latin de Constantinople: la diplomatie', *Acta Classica* 17 (1974), 106.

⁶² Akropolites, *The History*, ch. 30. ⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; Colbert-Fontainebleau, 382. See also Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 933.

⁶⁵ See the intriguing suggestions in Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean*, 65.

There are obvious parallels between John's opening campaigns as king of Jerusalem and Latin emperor, respectively. Perhaps the main point to make here is as follows. On both occasions the Latins' opponents could well have been greatly worried that John's arrival on the scene represented a significant accretion to the Westerners' military strength. However, the struggles in question, in their different ways, showed that the Latins were essentially no more powerful than beforehand. There was thus good reason for their enemies to take heart. In short, neither of John's reigns started well.

Vatatzes' success in 1233 perhaps encouraged him to take a more robust line with the papal envoys sent to him to discuss Church reunion. At Nicaea, in 1234, four friars – two Franciscan, two Dominican – held a series of colloquies with Vatatzes and the 'Nicaean' patriarch, Germanos II. These did not go very well. At the end, the Greeks may have been more hopeful than the situation really warranted.⁶⁶ At first, the friars declined to attend a Church council that would soon be held by the Orthodox side at Nymphaion. In the end, though, they did go. But the main reason for this was, apparently, the 'frightening situation' that had confronted them on their return to Constantinople.⁶⁷ Faced with it, the friars wrote:

And so we proposed to negotiate a one-year truce between the emperor of Constantinople and Vatatzes. . . . [I]ndeed, we consulted the chapter of St Sophia, and the prelates of the land, and the emperor himself on the matter, and all of them unanimously advised us to do so.

This is 'further evidence, if any were needed, that John and [mendicants] were intimate'.⁶⁸ But, even more than that, it tells us that the Latin Constantinopolitan elites were well aware of the peril in which they now stood.

The truce is never heard of again, though. As we have noted, the friars *did* attend the Church council at Nymphaion, but it broke up amidst violent recriminations and accusations of heresy and schism. This brought a sharp end to the dialogue between the papacy and Nicaea. Relations between the two 'remained frigid for years to come'.⁶⁹ Almost immediately, though, an alliance was concluded between Vatatzes and Asen.⁷⁰ Until now, Constantinople under John had been kept safe, above

⁶⁶ See Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 523–4; and J. Doran, 'Rites and wrongs: the Latin mission to Nicaea, 1234', *Studies in Church History* 32 (1996), 131–9.

⁶⁷ See above, 161–2.

⁶⁸ Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 227.

⁶⁹ See Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 524–5; and Doran, 'Rites and wrongs: the Latin mission to Nicaea', 139–44.

⁷⁰ Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople', 219.

all, by the divisions and suspicions separating her two mighty neighbours. Now that they had joined forces, this last great safeguard appeared to have been overcome.⁷¹

The 'War of the Three Johns'

The conflict that followed can be neatly labelled the 'War of the Three Johns' (Vatatzes, Asen, Brienne). Of the first two, Vatatzes plainly had the better of the deal that made the war possible.⁷² He was to receive the lion's share of the projected conquests from the Latins, including, above all, Constantinople itself (see Map 5). Asen was to be compensated not only with patriarchal standing for Trnovo but also with Nicaean acknowledgment of his position of *basileos*, and of his hegemony across the northern Balkans.⁷³ The alliance was fittingly sealed by the betrothal or marriage of Vatatzes' heir and de jure co-emperor, Theodore II Laskaris, to Asen's daughter, who had previously been promised to Baldwin.⁷⁴ We may presume that Vatatzes quickly overran the Latin gains from the campaign of 1233, including Pegai. It is clear that he re-established his former base at Lampsakos-Holkos. In early 1235 Vatatzes and Asen together liquidated the main Latin outposts in eastern Thrace, and their allied forces then appeared before the walls of Constantinople.

The Latins, for their part, had not been idle. They had appealed urgently for aid to all likely quarters, and chiefly, of course, that meant Venice. John and the Venetian *podestà* in Constantinople could well have dispatched a desperate plea together.⁷⁵ The government at Venice must surely have felt it had to respond positively, even without the added provocation of an alleged massacre at Venetian Gallipoli, when Vatatzes had crossed the straits.⁷⁶ A fleet of twenty-five ships hastily got under way.

As reconstructed by Langdon, Vatatzes and Asen's plan to capture Constantinople consisted of carefully coordinated attacks by land and sea, designed to force the outnumbered defenders to mass in one place, thus permitting a breakthrough to be made in another. The Latins' task was to disrupt this plan. Right from the outset, John seems to have set out to do so.

⁷¹ Paraphrasing M. Lower, *The Barons' Crusade: A Call to Arms and Its Consequences* (Philadelphia, 2005), 63.

⁷² Much of the following is adapted from Langdon, 'The forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian assault and siege of Constantinople,' 105–35.

⁷³ See also Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 535.

⁷⁴ See Akropolites, *The History*, chs. 31, 33–4, and Macrides' commentary on them.

⁷⁵ For this, see esp. Andrea Dandolo, *Chronica*, ed. E. Pastorello, in *RISS2*, XII, part 1, 295, where Dandolo starts to tell the story of the pawning of the Crown of Thorns.

⁷⁶ For Gregory's accusations against Vatatzes, see his *Registres*, II, nos. 2872–9.

According to John's own account (as mediated to us through Gregory IX and Mouskes), he personally led an unexpected, early cavalry sally from the land walls.⁷⁷ Indeed, if Mouskes is right, John may have repeated this tactic 'from his castle' – Blachernae? – with equal success a little later.⁷⁸ It is evident that, in his no longer extant letter to the pope, John presented at least the first of these sallies as a significant event. For instance, if we look at the issue of numbers: drawing on John's own account, Gregory IX and Mouskes agree that John had only 160 knights; that he faced forty or so enemy units; and that, in the end, only three of these units escaped.⁷⁹ This is proof, said the pope, that with God's aid, the lesser can defeat the greater, and Gregory compared the event to Abraham's victory over the Five Kings, and Jonathan's over 20,000 Philistines.⁸⁰ Mouskes, often bitterly critical of John, here praised him to the skies, with what looks rather like a nascent version of the 'Nine Worthies' concept: 'Not even Hector, Roland, Ogier or Judas Maccabeus... did such feats of arms as King John did that day.'⁸¹ Yet it would clearly be wrong to take this kind of statement at face value. Reading between the lines, it is plain that John's sally or sallies were limited, tactical victories. Doubtless, though, they were milked at the time, in Constantinople to boost flagging morale, and trumpeted out to the pope.

In any case, much else was happening as the assault gathered momentum. We hear of a separate attack, by Vatatzes' fleet, on the sea walls, but, in the end, this was successfully repulsed. It seems that there was chaos inside the city, too. According to Mouskes (although it is not clear where he got his information from), some Latins had disarmed the Greeks within Constantinople; and the latter were squabbling amongst themselves – presumably over whether to back their Latin masters, or to help the approaching *basileis*.⁸² It is not necessary to postulate that any single element 'saved' Latin Constantinople at this juncture, but, if there was one, then the best candidate is surely the 'sudden arrival of the [Venetian fleet, which] seems to have upset dramatically the strategic situation and

⁷⁷ Ibid.; Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 614–15.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 616; Langdon, 'The forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian assault and siege of Constantinople', 108.

⁷⁹ Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 614–15; Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, nos. 2872–9. Langdon has misread Mouskes' figure, which has thrown him off track here: Mouskes says 'VIIIxx', which is 160, not 800.

⁸⁰ Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, nos. 2872–9.

⁸¹ Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 614–15. It is believable that these heroes were carefully selected to reflect different aspects of John's career. Roland, of course, is the 'Frankish-French' hero par excellence; Judas Maccabeus the 'Lion of Judah', the archetype for godly warrior leadership in the Holy Land; and Hector the greatest fighter against the Greeks. Only the much rarer choice, Ogier, fails to fit in an obvious manner.

⁸² Ibid.

doomed the allied assault, whose success... necessitated a carefully coordinated dual attack by land and sea'.⁸³ Arriving off the city, the Venetians boldly engaged the larger enemy fleet. They seem to have succeeded in turning an organised withdrawal into a rout. It is widely agreed that the Nicaeans lost twenty-four ships in this engagement. Soon afterwards, Vatatzes and Asen drew their forces back from the walls, and the Venetians docked at Constantinople in triumph.

However, all too quickly the Venetian fleet departed for home, presumably on the assumption that the threat to the city would now be in abeyance until the spring. But they could not have been more wrong. Vatatzes and Asen unexpectedly wheeled their forces, and by late autumn they were again investing Constantinople. As we have seen, John managed to get word out to the pope by mid-December, doing everything he could to present his defence of the city, to date, as heroic. Forwarding John's pleas to Hungary, France and elsewhere, Gregory argued that such deeds had been willed by God, but that they would soon be rendered utterly futile if the necessary aid was not sent, at once, to save Constantinople from Vatatzes and Asen's 'infinite thousands of armed men'.⁸⁴

Langdon has pertinently suggested a change to Vatatzes and Asen's strategy this time. Since the earlier assaults had proved bloody and unsuccessful, it seems to have been decided at this point to pursue solely a 'tight siege' strategy. In truth, though, such a strategy was almost impossible for the Orthodox powers to achieve. They did not control the sea (three of Constantinople's four sides) in the way that they did the land. The weakness of the Nicaean naval blockade is perhaps best revealed by the speed with which the news got out, to Gregory IX, that the siege had been renewed.

The Latins' previous appeals may well have meant that much more help now reached them quickly. Mouskes reported the Venetians (for a second time), the Pisans and Genoese all sinking their differences in a scramble to save Constantinople. But both he and Aubry of Troisfontaines gave pride of place to the prince of Achaia, Geoffrey II of Villehardouin. The resultant combined expedition proved quite sufficient to sweep aside Vatatzes' naval cordon, landing jubilantly at Constantinople just as the Venetian fleet had done during the first siege.⁸⁵

⁸³ Langdon, 'The forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian assault and siege of Constantinople', 111.

⁸⁴ Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, nos. 2872–9.

⁸⁵ Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, II, 620; Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 938–9. In the seventeenth century the Jesuit Father Saulger suggested that the Venetian duke of the Archipelago also sent a flotilla, under the command of his son, Marco Sanudo. However, Langdon has found reasons to doubt this ('The forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian assault and siege of Constantinople', 131–2 n. 45).

Not long afterwards, Asen deserted Vatatzes. The dispirited Nicaean emperor responded by withdrawing his own forces as well, this time for good. How can we account for this crucial action of Asen's? Did he withdraw because Constantinople was on the verge of falling (i.e. to Vatatzes)? The evidence suggests the opposite: that Asen abandoned Vatatzes precisely because the city was *not* about to fall. The ineffectiveness of their almost year-long siege had been repeatedly exposed, and Asen had no stomach for a new round of active assaults – and all to capture a capital that would be Vatatzes' rather than his own. Presumably, the Latins had been doing everything they could to try to get Asen to break with Vatatzes. We know that, on 24 May 1236, Gregory IX instructed various Hungarian archbishops and their suffragans to excommunicate Asen unless he ended his alliance with Vatatzes and quit the siege. Despite that threat, Asen was carefully described in this letter, with comparatively deferential flattery, as 'nobilem virum Assanum', whereas Vatatzes was simply branded as an excommunicate.⁸⁶ Moreover, it would seem that, even before our John's death in March 1237, Asen had resumed his professions of loyalty to Rome, asking for 'some honourable and discreet person' to be sent, with whom he might discuss 'matters concerning... Constantinople and the... empire'.⁸⁷

Back in the seventeenth century, Robert Saulger gave Angelo Sanudo, the Venetian duke of the Archipelago, the credit for bringing about a two-year truce between John and Vatatzes in late 1236.⁸⁸ Whether there was, in fact, such a formal agreement or not, both sides now clearly needed a breathing space. Thus John got a respite for the few months remaining to him, which were probably far from pleasant ones. The pauper emperor of a shattered city, he could do little for his empire other than to hold the fort and plead for aid. In truth, though, this was all that he had ever been able to achieve as Latin emperor.

This is the appropriate place to try to sum up, and assess, John's career as a military figure. His main qualities as such are easy to list. He was clearly of great personal prowess as a knight, and this could well have been matched by comparable distinction as a cavalry leader. In both these spheres, dash and example counted for a great deal. As a commander, John was both reflective and cautious, and these should surely be considered strengths in one so chronically short of manpower and *matériel*. He was also dogged in pursuit of objectives that were often very difficult to achieve.

⁸⁶ Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, no. 3156. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 3694.

⁸⁸ 'Régestes des empereurs latins', no. 181*. Both Hendrickx and Langdon (see above, n. 85) have their doubts about Saulger's veracity.

In the end, though, John's military record comes down to the five major conflicts in which he acted as a leader after becoming king of Jerusalem: the 1210–11 Crusade, the Fifth Crusade, the War of the Keys, his campaign across the Dardanelles in 1233 and the War of the Three Johns. Ultimately, it has to be said, this is a record of defeat. Only the last of these can really be called a victory for him, in the sense that mere survival was the goal. So why was John remembered with such extravagant praise? For instance, as we have seen, he was compared to Hector, Alexander, Judas Maccabeus, Charlemagne and Roland, or even said to have outdone them all, as the greatest warrior ever. At this point, it is well worth mentioning a song about John that Salimbene reports, which he says began as follows: 'Ahead of all, now / Wonder of our times. . .'⁸⁹

How should we explain the apparent discrepancy? For a start, some of the most overblown praise is the product of blatant ulterior motives. Franciscans such as Salimbene, for example, often eulogise John to extol themselves and their order – which the emperor joined just before his death, as we shall see.⁹⁰ More broadly, John seems to have been judged less on the final outcomes of his wars than through a pervasive sense that he had done about as good a job as it was possible to do, often in very taxing circumstances. In particular, it can be suggested that his role, as a leading defender of the Latin East, automatically invited a certain overstatement and hyperbole. But it was the length and longevity of John's military life, and his astonishing career trajectory, that really made him stand out. These elements put John in rarified company, such as that of his contemporary, William Marshal, who rose from being a comparatively humble knight to become ruler of England.⁹¹ The notion that 'the sky was the limit' for a successful knight was something akin to the 'American dream' of its day – a point that we return to, below.⁹² In short, it *was* natural to see John as a great soldier, despite the dismal ends of most of his major conflicts. Perhaps it is best to conclude a little flippantly. John was, in truth, a fine military leader for the principal missions that he undertook, namely the tenacious defence of prized causes in the Latin East that were ultimately unsustainable.

In 1235–6 Latin Constantinople had survived – just. However, it was abundantly clear that, without substantial reinforcements from the West, John was really fighting 'a losing battle'.⁹³ Although Gregory IX was committed to succouring the Latin empire, over the course of the last few years he had come to focus, instead, on a great new crusade to the

⁸⁹ Below, 186. ⁹⁰ Below, 180–1, 186–7. ⁹¹ For more on this, see above, 5.

⁹² Below, 193–4. ⁹³ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 168.

Holy Land. This was formally proclaimed on 17 November 1234.⁹⁴ As we have seen, though, a year later the pope received John's letter calling for urgent aid to save Constantinople. Gregory now took a momentous decision. He resolved that the situation on the Bosphorus had to take precedence, for the moment, over Jerusalem. Accordingly, he moved to 'divert. . . Holy Land crusaders to Constantinople, and to encourage those who had not yet taken crusade vows to campaign there'.⁹⁵ While this could well have been some relief to John, he knew just how difficult it was to raise crusaders for Jerusalem, let alone for the Latin empire. In truth, though, Gregory's gambit could not – and did not – make much difference to the paucity, even indifference, of the West's response to Constantinople's plight. The upshot, as before, tended in the direction of the '[area-specific] crusades of the fourteenth century [and later], where the parties involved had close connections with the regions concerned'.⁹⁶

It is worth mentioning certain features of Gregory's efforts after December 1235, when he was prioritising the rescue of Constantinople. The papacy had long recognised that Hungary was the best placed geographically, of all the reliably Latin land powers, to reinvigorate the Latin empire. Back in the early 1230s Gregory himself had tried to induce a small but high-profile band of Hungarian crusaders to redeem their vows on the Bosphorus. But in the end, it seems, nothing had come of this.⁹⁷ The receipt of John's letter was the start of a period when the pope steadily increased the pressure on the new Hungarian king, Béla IV. Just after John's death (but when he had not yet heard news of it), Gregory dispatched a letter to Vatatzes, threatening him with a powerful army of crusaders – 'something of a bluff', as Lower charitably puts it; and the bishop of Perugia, on his way over to Asen, was instructed to call in at the Hungarian court en route. The inference seems clear. Gregory wanted a grand alliance, involving Hungarian crusaders, Asen and Latin Constantinople, all against Vatatzes.⁹⁸ In the end, though, Hungarian support for the Latin empire never reached anything near the level that the papacy really wanted.

⁹⁴ Gregory IX, *Registres*, I, nos. 2200–2.

⁹⁵ See the summary by Lower, *The Barons' Crusade*, 4.

⁹⁶ M. Barber, 'Western attitudes to Frankish Greece in the thirteenth century', in B. Arbel, B. Hamilton and D. Jacoby, eds., *Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204* (London, 1989), 126.

⁹⁷ Lower, *The Barons' Crusade*, 75–6.

⁹⁸ Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, nos. 3693, 3716; Lower, *The Barons' Crusade*, 83–4; and see also below, 182.

The *Chronicle of Cluny* explains that, by the end of 1235, the pope was ‘sending into France for aid for John, emperor of Constantinople, who was oppressed by Greeks and Saracens’ (!).⁹⁹ Gregory focused, as ever, on northeastern France, where Theobald IV of Champagne had recently taken the cross for the Holy Land. In the event, though, all the pope’s labours to make Theobald commute his vow failed. The count led his host to the kingdom of Jerusalem in 1239.¹⁰⁰ But perhaps the most telling feature of Gregory’s policy in France was his efforts to recruit close kinsmen of John and Baldwin’s. The pope even named one such figure to target: Erard of Chacenay, who may well have been the leading authority in the county of Brienne, as effective *bailli* for the absent Walter IV.¹⁰¹ For all Erard’s importance in the county, it does look rather forlorn for the pope to specify a lord of his stature. Unable to whip up a massed response or recruit great princes, Gregory was clearly hoping that family ties, at a rather mid-ranking level, would achieve about as much as could be done.

From earthly realms to the heavenly kingdom

A range of evidence shows that John became a Franciscan before he died. The Benedictine Matthew Paris’s observation, that John became a Franciscan ‘some years’ prior to his death, has long been known.¹⁰² But Wolff has identified two further thirteenth-century sources, admittedly both Franciscan, to support the basic contention that John did indeed enter the order, although they disagree with Paris about when precisely he did so. These sources are Salimbene’s *Cronica* and Bernard of Besse’s *Liber de laudibus beati Francisci*. The accounts of John’s ‘conversion’ in these sources *may* be related, but there are some significant differences between the two. Take, for instance, the matter of John’s ague (and it is worth emphasising here that these are almost the only thirteenth-century sources that mention this affliction). Bernard seems to say that John suffered from it only on a certain, specific occasion, at the very end of his life.¹⁰³ By contrast, Salimbene – probably embellishing, as ever, what little information he has – is alone in declaring that John was seriously

⁹⁹ *Chronico Cluniacensis coenobii*, in *RHGF*, XVIII, 743. The word ‘Saracens’ here is clearly a generic term for those opposed to the Latins. For the use of the word in this way, see A. V. Murray, ‘The Saracens of the Baltic: pagan and Christian Lithuanians in the perception of English and French crusaders to late medieval Prussia’, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41 (2010), 422–5.

¹⁰⁰ Lower, *The Barons’ Crusade*, 93–115.

¹⁰¹ Gregory IX, *Registres*, II, no. 2877, also 3395; ‘Catalogue’, no. 168.

¹⁰² Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, II, 396 and n. 3.

¹⁰³ Bernard of Besse, *Liber de laudibus beati Francisci*, 681.

troubled by the ague throughout his life: 'King John, when he was being armed for battle, [would] tremble like a reed in the water...' – and this then gives Salimbene an opportunity for some easy sermonising. Coming to the matter of John's conversion, Salimbene says that '[John] became a Friar Minor, and he would have persevered in the order all the rest of his life, if God had only prolonged it. He was received [into the order]... by the minister for Greece, namely Brother Benedict of Arezzo, who was a holy man.'¹⁰⁴ A much longer and more detailed account is given by Bernard of Besse. This is the start of a chain of Franciscan testimonies, all of which mention John having 'ominous dreams' that induced him to join the order. Bernard's narrative is also plainly a part of the rich tradition of 'habit stories' amongst the mendicant orders, in which the conferral of the habit, often in visions, is taken as a sign of membership of the order in question, sometimes in the context of 'catching' prominent individuals.¹⁰⁵ According to Bernard, a mysterious old man, dressed top to toe in ravishing white, appeared to the Emperor John in a dream, carrying the garb of a Franciscan. The old man stated solemnly that John was destined to die wearing it. After several 'increasingly alarming' repetitions of this vision, John gave in – joining the order, as Salimbene says, not all that long before his death.¹⁰⁶

Wolff concludes: 'A modern scholar need not... believe in John's dream[s]; but it is difficult not to believe that he joined the order. There is such scanty information available, in general, for events in the Latin empire of Constantinople... that if the historian began to disregard... items as well documented as this, he would shortly have nothing whatever to say.'¹⁰⁷ This, though, is not the best argument we have. It is better to conclude that John's eventual reception into the Franciscan Order admirably fits the developing tenor of his religious life and spiritual predilections, as we have traced them over the course of many years.

Whilst some well-informed chroniclers agree that John died in 1237, other thirteenth-century figures put forward a variety of dates, ranging as late as 1246.¹⁰⁸ The evidence adduced by Böhm to confirm that John died

¹⁰⁴ Salimbene, *Cronica*, I, 62–3.

¹⁰⁵ See esp. the lengthy discussion of the habit by A. Jotischky, *The Carmelites and Antiquity: Mendicants and Their Past in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2002), 45–78.

¹⁰⁶ Bernard of Besse, *Liber de laudibus beati Francisci*, 681; Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 214–21.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 941; Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, 194; Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, II, 396 and n. 3; and William of Nangis, *Chronicon*, 551.

in 1237 is, unfortunately, flawed. Böhm notes an *actum* in which Frederick II expressed his (purely formal) sorrow, on hearing that his ‘dear father-in-law’ had recently died, in difficult circumstances, in Constantinople. But this *actum* actually bears no date. Its editors ascribed it to 1237 precisely because they already knew, on independent grounds, that John did indeed die in that year. Thus we cannot use this *actum* to prove that contemporaries were aware that John had recently died in 1237.¹⁰⁹ Yet Böhm’s basic contention is correct. In the latter half of that year, when the Latins attacked Tzouroulos in alliance with Asen, Constantinople seems to be under new leadership: that of the brief *bailli*, Anseau of Cayeux.¹¹⁰ Rather more dramatic evidence, though, comes from an exchange of letters between Gregory IX and Vatatzes, in mid- to late 1237. On 21 May (*this* date is certain!) Gregory wrote to Vatatzes, threatening him with a projected army of crusaders that would come to the aid of the Latin emperor John. In his letter, the pope mentioned John as someone still living, despite the fact that John had actually died almost exactly two months earlier. Vatatzes was able to make a cheap, grim jibe out of Gregory’s ignorance. In his reply – presumably written soon after receiving the pope’s letter – he observed that John ‘was obliged to quit this life some time ago; but [evidently,] for you, he [still] has life and movement’.¹¹¹

A range of northern French obituary notices give us a quite precise time frame for John’s death, namely 19–23 March (1237).¹¹² From largely the same sources, we also know that John’s wife, the Empress Berengaria, died in April. The abbey of Maubuisson – almost a ‘family’ monastery, founded by Berengaria’s aunt, the French queen mother Blanche – puts forward an exact date: 12 April.¹¹³ But, in Berengaria’s case, in what year? Aubry of Troisfontaines recorded Berengaria’s demise under the year 1237, straight after that of her husband. Perhaps, though, he only did this for the sake of narrative neatness.¹¹⁴ Yet it is quite believable that Berengaria survived John by only a matter of weeks. Maybe both died of the kinds of plague and other diseases that so often follow in the wake of assaults and sieges, such as those of 1235–6.

John was, in the end, the only Latin emperor to die in his capital. Conceivably, then, there was no great Latin tradition to dictate where he

¹⁰⁹ *Regesta Imperii*, V, part 1, no. *2249; Böhm, *Johann von Brienne*, 97 n. 40.

¹¹⁰ See ‘*Régestes des empereurs latins*’, no. 187.

¹¹¹ V. Grumel, ‘Un problème littéraire: l’authenticité de la lettre de Jean Vatatzès, empereur de Nicée, au Pape Grégoire IX’, *Echos d’Orient* 29 (1930), 450–8.

¹¹² *Obituaires de la province de Sens*, I, part 1, 548; part 2, 650, 655. Böhm says the 24th, relying on St Catherine’s (*Johann von Brienne*, 97 n. 40), but this looks like an error.

¹¹³ *Obituaires de la province de Sens*, I, part 2, 650, 655.

¹¹⁴ Aubry of Troisfontaines, *Chronicon*, 941.

should be buried.¹¹⁵ Certainly, one illustrious Western leader, the Venetian doge Enrico Dandolo, had been interred in Hagia Sophia, in 1205.¹¹⁶ This being so, we should not dismiss out of hand the suggestion, by the ‘Minstrel of Reims’, that John was laid to rest there too. But the Minstrel is never very reliable on points such as this.¹¹⁷ There is an alternative – perhaps more likely – burial site. Just around the time of or just after John’s death, the Franciscans constructed the largest purpose-built Latin church ever erected in the former Byzantine sphere. Situated across the Golden Horn in Galata, it was naturally dedicated to their founding father, St Francis himself. Beautifully decorated with mosaics both inside and out, the church boasted three subsidiary chapels, as well as an adjoining convent, the headquarters of the Franciscan province of ‘Romania’. It may well have been ‘the finest [Latin] church ever built in the empire’.¹¹⁸ Perhaps John sponsored this project at the very end of his life – possibly to give thanks for the withdrawal of Vatatzes and Asen in 1236? Since John did choose to die as a Franciscan, this great new church was an obvious place for him to be buried.

It may be, though, that John’s mortal remains ended up in an even greater church of St Francis: in the Lower Basilica in Assisi itself. Whilst that basilica has relatively few graves or monuments, it does contain an ornate, rather odd-looking tomb or memorial, with no writing on it at all (see Illustration 5).¹¹⁹ However, the arms of the Latin empire are repeated all over it. Moreover, the same crowned male figure is represented twice: below, dead or in repose; and above, in a contorted position, perched rather awkwardly atop a lion, next to an attendant Madonna and Child.

The arms and the figure together lead us to the Latin emperors. Giuseppe Gerola considered all the possibilities, and was able to narrow it down to just two. The ‘tomb’ was put up either for John, or for his grandson, the later titular emperor Philip of Courtenay (d. 1283). Gerola initially favoured Philip; later, he changed his mind. Gerola noted that a nearby chapel in the Lower Basilica contains repeated depictions of the Brienne arms, as well as what is probably a representation of the fourteenth-century count of Brienne and titular duke of Athens, Walter VI (d. 1356). Certainly, that

¹¹⁵ See P. Lock, ‘The Latin emperors as heirs to Byzantium’, in P. Magdalino, ed., *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 304.

¹¹⁶ T. Madden, *Enrico Dandolo and the Rise of Venice* (London, 2003), 194.

¹¹⁷ *Récits d’un ménestrel de Reims*, ch. 41.

¹¹⁸ Frazee, ‘The Catholic Church in Constantinople’, 38.

¹¹⁹ Francis himself now rests in the crypt below the Lower Basilica, surrounded by his most faithful brothers.

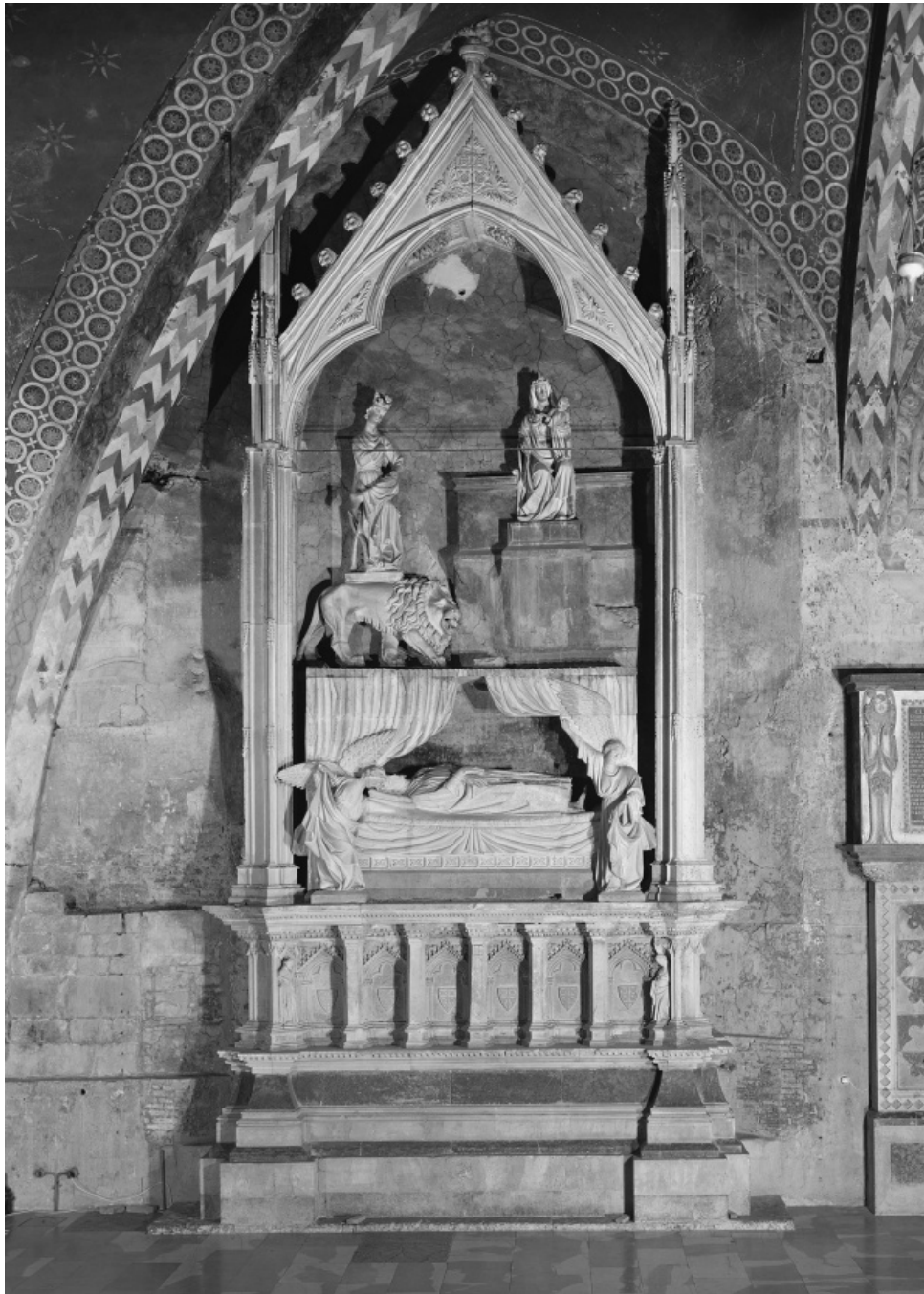


Illustration 5 The 'Tomb of King John of Jerusalem' in the Lower Basilica, Assisi

chapel was later described as pertaining to ‘the most illustrious and excellent duke of Athens’ (that is, to Walter himself). Wolff has added a couple of points to this. We know that Walter was very generous to the Franciscans; and he brought back from Greece the head of his own father, Walter V, severed in the battle of Cephissus in 1311. Did Walter VI also bring back from the East the body of his greatest predecessor, the Latin emperor John, and have it re-interred in the Lower Basilica? As Wolff notes, ‘[T]his view [does coincide] with the testimony of the earliest sources as to the occupant of the tomb.’¹²⁰

On the basis of a fairly recent, in-depth artistic examination of the ‘tomb’, the German art historian Jürgen Wiener has fleshed out much of the above, but he has also left a few question marks. Wiener concludes that the ‘tomb’ may well date from as late as the middle of the fourteenth century. This brings us away from the period of Philip of Courtenay to that of Walter VI. In truth, Wiener gives us good grounds for believing that the ‘tomb’ was never properly finished. Furthermore, he makes much of the idea that the lion on it stands for John’s past as king of Jerusalem, and this can connect John to the ‘Lion of Judah’, Judas Maccabeus.¹²¹ We have already noted that Mouskes made this link, but he is not, in fact, the only one to do so. The Franciscan Salimbene compares John both to Judas Maccabeus and to a lion. This may confirm that, by the time the ‘tomb’ was going up, this had become a more or less standard *topos* for Franciscans, when presenting or representing John. Salimbene writes: ‘And when, in battle, [John] struck here and there with his iron club, the Saracens fled before him as if they were facing the Devil, or a lion appearing to devour them. . . [W]hat is written concerning Judas Maccabeus in 1 Maccabees 3 fits [John]: “He was like a lion in his exploits / Like a lion’s whelp roaring for prey.”’¹²² But it is worth adding that the lion is a Brienne symbol too. As is well known, the basic family crest was *Azure, a lion rampant or*.¹²³

Walter VI’s focus on the Greek–Byzantine sphere was born out of his determination to recover his father’s lost duchy of Athens. He aimed to achieve his goals through the powerful Angevins of Naples, with whom the Briennes had long had a client-like relationship.¹²⁴ An early strike into Epiros, at the start of the 1330s, did not go very well. After that, Walter seems to have made an agreement with his mother-in-law, the titular Latin

¹²⁰ See Wolff, ‘The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans’, 234–7.

¹²¹ See J. Wiener, *Das Grabmal des Johann von Brienne, Kaiser von Konstantinopel und König von Jerusalem* (Düsseldorf, 1997), esp. 15–17, 29–36, 106–19.

¹²² Salimbene, *Cronica*, I, 62–3. ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 40 n. 162.

¹²⁴ See de Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d’Athènes*, 136–244.

empress Catherine of Valois. There is some debate about what this involved, but surely it aimed, ultimately, at the resurrection of the Brienne duchy of Athens, as well as the recapture of Constantinople? Walter spent much of the next decade trying to get an overambitious scheme for reconquest off the ground, looking not only to the Angevins, as ever, but also to Catherine's half-brother, the French king Philip VI, and to Pope Benedict XII at Avignon. The climax of Walter's career actually came in 1342–3, when he was briefly *signior* of Florence.¹²⁵ In light of all this, it is not difficult to see why Walter might well have caused the 'tomb' to be erected. His aim, above all, was clearly to promote himself and his dynasty for the great war of reconquest that he had in mind – enlisting his family's history of rule in the Latin empire at the very highest level.

In the process, Walter VI was surely emphasising John's personal relationship with Francis, and perhaps also his role in the spectacular early growth of the Friars Minor. It is believable that, by the middle of the fourteenth century, John's place in both of the above had come to be greatly exaggerated. Yet his career really had been intertwined with the rise of the order; and, as Latin emperor, he was the first crowned head, and the highest-ranking figure ever, to join it. Furthermore, John's example in this respect was followed, in due course, by at least one leading member of the Angevin dynasty, Walter VI's chief patrons.¹²⁶ Small wonder, then, that the Franciscans remembered John with great affection. Bernard of Besse implies that John was the greatest warrior of all time, just as Alexander of Hales had been the greatest theologian, and John of Rupella the greatest preacher. The rather banal central point is that all three had been Franciscans.¹²⁷ Salimbene is not to be outdone here, though. It is he who mentions the laudatory, presumably Franciscan song about John and also 'about Master Alexander', which Salimbene claims to have sung 'many times. And it begins like this: "Ahead of all, now / Wonder of our times. . ."'¹²⁸ There is no doubt that John's name retained its resonance in Franciscan circles for a long time after his death. Wiener has noted several, rather later, prominent depictions of John, in Franciscan churches in the order's heartland, Umbria. John's image can be seen in the Upper Basilica in Assisi, in the choir stall. Equally, in the ex-church of S. Francesco in Montefalco, John is portrayed in a fresco of

¹²⁵ See esp. Wiener, *Das Grabmal des Johann von Brienne*, 111–12, but also de Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 185–233.

¹²⁶ See S. Kelly, *The New Solomon: Robert of Naples (1309–1343) and Fourteenth-Century Kingship* (Brill, 2003), esp. 8, 73–132.

¹²⁷ Bernard of Besse, *Liber de laudibus beati Francisci*, 686. ¹²⁸ Salimbene, *Cronica*, I, 62.

the most celebrated Franciscans, next to Walter VI's sometime lord, King Robert 'the Wise' of Naples.¹²⁹ It is worth underlining that, at the time that the 'tomb project' was on the cards, the order itself stood to benefit, a great deal, from re-emphasising its links with John. For a variety of reasons, the Franciscans' place in the Church had become rather tarnished by the 1340s. They could have been seeking to bury the traumas of the recent past by harking back to John: to former glories in the Latin East, to the *poverello* himself and, most importantly, to a time when the order's religious orthodoxy had been unquestioned.

Much turns on the matter of the precise timing of the 'tomb project'. Wiener has rightly noted that, during Walter's *signoria* in Florence, one of his most notorious associates was a certain William of Assisi, and William's brother, the Franciscan Nicholas, was Walter's chancellor. From 1339 Nicholas was not only bishop of Assisi but also the guardian of the *sacro convento* there. Might this be the *terminus post quem* for the 'tomb project', with Nicholas driving it in Assisi itself?¹³⁰ Turning to the question of when the project ended, what is beyond doubt is that Walter's ambitions took a heavy kicking in the mid-1340s. He was forced to flee Florence in 1343, withdrawing to France soon afterwards.¹³¹ From then on, was the tomb project a large, unnecessary expense? Maybe its irregular look is a sign that Walter called time on the project in the mid-1340s or so, leaving it unfinished.¹³²

If Walter did not complete the tomb, did he get round to transferring John's body to it? This is a question that is unlikely to be answered definitively, unless and until the relevant authorities give permission to look inside the sarcophagus. It brings up a rather broader issue, though. Did Walter ever have possession of John's physical remains? We know that Walter brought back the head of his own father from Greece. But not even our source for that also says that Walter somehow got hold of what was left of John.¹³³ So it may be best to infer that Walter never had possession of John's remains, but merely *intended* to re-inter them in Assisi, following

¹²⁹ Wiener, *Das Grabmal des Johann von Brienne*, 113 n. 240. ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113–14.

¹³¹ De Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 230–3.

¹³² Wiener, *Das Grabmal des Johann von Brienne*, 115. However, Wiener overstates the finality of Walter's withdrawal from Italy in the 1340s. Walter did, in fact, return to the peninsula in 1352 (de Sassenay, *Les Brienne de Lecce et d'Athènes*, 240–2).

¹³³ Bourgeois reports the following tradition in his *Histoire des comtes de Brienne*, 30–1: that John brought back from the East a finger of John the Baptist, which he consigned to the abbey of Bassefontaine, where he himself was later buried. This tale is partially corrected in *Revue catholique* 25 (1923), in which it is stated that the finger was brought back to Bassefontaine by Count Walter V of Brienne (*sic?* – meaning Walter VI?). Walter VI is certainly a better candidate than John for bringing body parts back from the East; and, of course, there is little reason to credit the story that John was ever buried at Bassefontaine.

the war of reconquest in the East. Since the reconquest never took place, the body was never acquired, and never transferred to the 'tomb', which therefore ended up as no more than a cenotaph. Nevertheless, within fifty years or so the Franciscan chronicler 'Pisanus' could write, with apparent confidence: '[Johannes] sepultus est Assisii, etsi super sepulturam in habitu regali sit sculptus.'¹³⁴

¹³⁴ See *Analecta Franciscana*, IV (1906), 347; cited by Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 234.

Conclusion

The conclusion of a biographical study is a good place to offer a few thoughts about the subject's character, as it has been traced over the course of his or her life. Of course, it is easy to be dismissive about all efforts to get inside the personality of a medieval figure such as John. But his behaviour, in so far as it can be pieced together, surely affords us a few signal pointers. What evidence we have suggests twin poles in his soul – ambition in tension with caution – all within the context of a fairly reflective temperament. These features are repeatedly discernible, not just in John as a war leader (which is, arguably, where we see them most clearly) but also in his broader political conduct.

There can be no doubt that, when the stakes were high enough, John was capable of taking calculated risks. Perhaps the most obvious examples of this are when, as has been suggested, he covertly assisted his cousin Erard's marriage scheme; and when, during the Fifth Crusade, he took a robust line against papal and imperial representatives, to assert what he regarded as his own rights. But occasions such as these, when he set himself rather against his leading backers, were few and far between. Moreover, it is telling that, in both these cases, John moved swiftly to mend his relationships with the chief Western powers concerned. The most likely explanation for this, and for other instances of John's characteristic caution, is that, throughout his career, he was well aware of the relative weakness of his power base and position.

Such caution may have prevented John from really asserting himself, in his own political arenas, in a way that bolder spirits might have done. But, naturally, it also protected him from unwarranted risks and disasters. Moreover, we could infer that this self-same caution was crucial in making John appear, to contemporaries, as a 'safe pair of hands'. The personal impression he made, on people who counted, was plainly an essential – perhaps *the* essential – element in his unique career trajectory. John may well have performed very much better in this respect than did, for instance, his own son-in-law, the Latin emperor Baldwin II. If the 'Minstrel of Reims' is right about this particular point, the queen mother

Blanche did not think all that much of Baldwin when he first appeared at the French court.¹ Image and appearance could both count for a great deal in the business of self-promotion. And it would seem that, throughout most of his career, John could and did cut a fine figure in both war and peace: tall, well built, apparently good-looking, vigorous, leading adroitly from the front.

This brings us back to the citation from Gibbon with which we opened: 'It was only in the age of chivalry, that valour could ascend from a private station to the thrones of Jerusalem and Constantinople.' We can supplement this with Mayer's comment: '[John's] career [is] remarkable for his continual attempts to obtain one crown after another.' The first of these observations is plainly inadequate, and the second is simplistic even as a summary, coming dangerously close to caricature.

Step by step, this book has sought to refine our understanding of a range of principal themes, covering a period of more than thirty years, at the zenith of the 'crusading movement'. Amongst these, it is right to pick out the following: the situation and strength of the Jerusalemite monarchy in the early thirteenth century, as operated by a comparatively weak newcomer; how far that picture was altered by a great crusade, the Fifth; and the light shed on a little-known but critical period in the brief life of the Latin empire of Constantinople.

How, in truth, should we explain John's career as a whole, though – or, to return to the phrasing of the introduction, what does a truly exceptional life, such as John's, reveal about the 'more normal' workings of the Latin Christendom of his day, which produced it? A fundamental point is that John's career was not completely unprecedented. This supports the view that it flowed quite naturally from the circumstances of the time. John's life is a particularly memorable, if not quite supreme, example of social and geographical mobility, set within the context of Bartlett's central medieval 'aristocratic diaspora'. Moreover, it is important to underline that this diaspora was a characteristic element *within* the contemporary West, as well as being a crucial factor that shaped the relationship between the Latin Western heartland and its frontiers and peripheries. For particularly telling examples of the diaspora within the West, we could cite not only the well-known 'Savoyards' and Lusignans in Henry III's England but also our John's own sons in France and Spain.

In this book, it has been repeatedly stressed that John was a 'not quite first-rank' figure. This leads directly to the question of why there were so many examples of this particular echelon within the aristocratic diaspora.

¹ *Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims*, ch. 41.

Perhaps the key point here is as follows. Such lords often had sufficient wherewithal, at home, to make a go of their ventures further afield. But they were not of such substance and importance that there was nothing really driving them to go out there (that is, to seek to advance their own and their family's standing). We have also noted John's place amongst aristocrats of a Western provenance who were 'parachuted into' the Latin East as expedient leaders in periods of dynastic and/or military insecurity. However, these figures sometimes ended up discarded, once they had served their turn in their new territory. But, by then, they might have become attractive, nonetheless, to other realms in a similar state or situation. Hence, individuals such as John could become what have been labelled, for the purposes of this book, 'crown men'. Whatever we may call it, this is a fascinating phenomenon, yet to be properly quarried.

This book has also explored a variety of ways in which an incoming aristocrat could infiltrate a 'host' society. There were, of course, both dynastic and non-dynastic routes to do this. The critical failure of John's career came in the dynastic sphere. He never managed to sire a line of Brienne rulers. The truth is that dynastic doors, heaved open with much effort, could easily slam shut again according to the unpredictable rhythms of births, deaths, marriages and majorities. This can make 'alien', ultimately unsuccessful aristocrats appear rather like comets: flashing across the sky, even dominating the scene for a time, but leaving comparatively little trace behind in the longer run. We have also seen evidence of the tensions that newcomers could bring with them – to take an obvious example, increased pressure on a limited pool of patronage and other resources. This was particularly the case in the pressure-cooker environments of the kingdom of Jerusalem and the Latin empire of Constantinople. In sum, interlopers needed to be accepted as part of the general picture. And when Frederick II's agents failed to achieve this in the Holy Land, the price was ultimately paid not by the emperor but by the Jerusalemite monarchy itself.²

As this book has proceeded, we have kept a close eye on the source material to see what contemporaries were really looking for from people such as John. We have also drawn parallels, where appropriate, with other individuals, groups and networks. Although we have touched on the connections between John's career and that of William Marshal, the most obvious person to compare John to, as may well be clear by now, is Guy of Lusignan, a generation earlier (d. 1194). A brief reminder of the salient points of Guy's career can help lead us onward to some broader

² For this, see esp. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 43–76.

conclusions. Like John, Guy was the younger son of a French count of essentially regional stature and importance, but with greater aspirations. Taking advantage of the position and connections that his brother had already achieved in the Holy Land, and the family's vassalic links back to a Western great power, the Angevin King Henry II of England, Guy became king(-consort) of Jerusalem in 1186. Even before that, though, Guy had proved to be a deeply divisive figure, and the catastrophic defeat at the battle of Hattin, a year later, reignited debate about his fitness to rule. Guy's efforts to restore his authority were fatally compromised when his wife, Queen Sibylla, died without issue, leaving him blocking the 'natural succession' of the crown to her half-sister. The endgame was reached when the leading figure in the Holy Land at the time – namely Henry II's heir, King Richard the Lionheart – ceased to sustain Guy's claim that he should remain king of Jerusalem for life. However, Richard *was* able to oversee the process by which Guy was compensated with the effectively independent new lordship of Cyprus. Like John later, though, Guy was not inclined to accept losing the crown of Jerusalem quietly, regarding it as his for life, and he continued to style himself as its king.³

As even this brief summary indicates, Guy and John's careers make most sense in a world of 'clusters' and clientage. It is entirely understandable that connected groups of newcomers could be central or key, at times, in specific locations and contexts. Furthermore, it is not surprising that this happened repeatedly in the Holy Land itself, even though it was widely regarded as Latin Christendom's common heritage and enterprise. As we have seen, much of the backdrop to John's career was provided by the significant Champenois clusters already in place, in the kingdoms of Jerusalem and Cyprus alike, and in the Latin empire; and these communities were far from cut off from their old homeland back in the West. This begs an obvious question. How far were the Champenois *the* group or cluster making the running in the Latin East as a whole in the 1190s to 1220s/1240s – that is, during much of the zenith of the crusading movement? Here is another subject that certainly warrants further investigation.⁴

Arguably, clientage was the defining motif of Latin East–West relations, certainly from 1187 to the mid-1220s, as a precursor to the later 'cross-Mediterranean agglomerations' of Frederick II and Charles of

³ This survey of Guy's career is derived chiefly from Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, 23–9.

⁴ To date, the best work we have on this matter can probably be found in Y. Bellenger and D. Quérue, eds., *Les Champenois et la croisade* (Paris, 1989); and in D. Quérue, ed., *Jean de Joinville: de la Champagne aux royaumes d'Outre-mer* (Langres, 1998).

Anjou. The intensification of these relations, to reach and sustain a new level after 1187, *did* strengthen the Latin East, and so provides one of the best arguments we have to rebut simple models of thirteenth-century stagnation and decline. But it is worth noting at least one weakness that this development brought in its train. It made it even more difficult for Latin Eastern rulers to present themselves as the equals of their great contemporaries in the West. In particular, it was surely impossible for the likes of Guy and John to 'play the king' convincingly to the West, since it was well known that they had been promoted to the role, not born to it. Innocent III, of course, can be described as the chief architect of the Mediterranean world that the Briennes exploded onto in the early decades of the thirteenth century. Innocent left the Church far better equipped to assert itself, as part of this Western 'clientage' game, than would otherwise have been the case. In fact, John's life can be used as a kind of barometer of the strength of the newly aggrandised papacy. Successive popes were now strong enough to be the essential power propping John up, if we take his career as a whole. Nevertheless, to achieve their goals in the Holy Land and elsewhere, the popes were obliged to work with and through a rather second-rate figure such as him. In a somewhat similar way, we might add, not even all the resources of the post-Innocentian papacy sufficed to bring about a massed Western response to the plight of Latin Constantinople.

It was clientage, more than anything else, that bound John's career together. It was the backing of Countess Blanche of Champagne and then of Philip Augustus, and maybe of Innocent III too, that really made John king of Jerusalem: the critical upward step that led to the rest of his career. Frederick II shored up John's kingship in the later stages of John's reign, but then abruptly terminated it. It was the papacy, above all, that sustained John in quasi-royal stature after 1225. This surely facilitated what marks John out as unique: his subsequent rise again to be Latin emperor. What is telling about all this is just how much it is a story of Western great powers.

It is well worth stressing a few, perhaps obvious, points that emerge from this. For all the influence or control exerted by distant Western patrons, there was often enough to be gained to make it attractive to be a leading client figure 'on the spot'. As we have seen, John's career quickly became a celebrated *exemplum* of the heights that could be attained. The following words of Philip of Novara still have something of their power to excite. How much more resonant must such sentiments have been in his and John's own day? 'A good knight, by the fame of his valour and by his effort, has frequently come into great riches and acquisitions. And many of them have been crowned kings, and others have had great riches and

lordships.’⁵ Furthermore, the leading man on the spot could often be politically key, more so than his far-flung ‘superiors’ – meaning that his personal and dynastic goals came to the fore, rather than theirs. All of this provides yet more reason to investigate both such major ‘clients’ and the circumstances in which they sought to realise their aims.

There is no surviving medieval narrative that takes John alone as its main subject: no *Vita*, no *Gesta*, no William-Marshall-style epic poem. (And this is despite the inappropriate title that has been given to John of Tolve’s *De domino Iohanne rege Ierusalem*.) Instead, John has a range of ‘walk-on’ parts – although it is, of course, true that in some of these narratives, such as Ernoul–Bernard and Colbert–Fontainebleau, he does hold the stage for a lengthy period. The limitations of these accounts provide a further reason, if any were needed, to focus on the extant *acta* and other contemporary official documentation. (Appendix 1 lists as many such principal neglected sources as has proved possible to identify.) The fact that John does not appear as the sole main subject of any medieval narrative reflects an important truth about him that Böhm identified, more than seventy years ago, namely that John was never a truly independent figure. ‘He remained reliant, always, on the powers that had raised him.’⁶ Part of what made John so useful, both in life and also in terms of later reportage, was that he appeared readily ‘constructible’ to serve a variety of interests.

To retain the backing that he always needed, it was important for John to preserve a good reputation and standing, especially in the eyes of patrons, but also vis-à-vis what we may call the ‘public opinion’ of contemporary Latin Christendom. Hazy though our sources are about this, we can begin to perceive John acting in this way. The most obvious example can be found at the end of the Fifth Crusade, when John was seeking, with some justice, to avoid getting saddled with the blame for its failure. Other instances may include the aftermaths of the ‘Erard of Brienne affair’, and maybe of John’s defeat in the War of the Keys. John was, of course, only one of many figures who were looking to ‘package the record’ to suit their own particular agenda. This is a fundamental reason why what sources we have are so difficult to interpret with confidence. When we are able to discern such ‘spin’, though, the intervening centuries – between ourselves and John – rather drop away. There is more than a *frisson* of connection, here, between the politics of our day and that of 800 years ago.

⁵ Tellingly cited by Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 24. Philip’s focus on ‘valour’ is, of course, a characteristic medieval *topos*. It is picked up later, too much, by Gibbon.

⁶ Böhm, *Johann von Brienne*, 98.

Appendix 1 List of little-known *acta* closely concerning John of Brienne

Below are listed the principal neglected *acta* that are not mentioned, or referred to, in any of the following:

Böhm, *Johann von Brienne*;

‘Catalogue d’actes des comtes de Brienne’, compiled by d’Arbois de Jubainville;

Die Urkunden der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem, compiled by Mayer and Richard;

Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani, compiled by Röhricht; and

‘Régestes des empereurs latins de Constantinople’, compiled by Hendrickx.

Although the number below is not that great, this is, in fact, a sizeable increase. The following list is a catalogue designed to allow the relevant texts to be tracked down easily. For this reason, the summaries are kept to an absolute minimum, revealing only the barest bones – that is, these documents’ links to John.

- 1 ‘1200’. Walter [III], count of Brienne, makes a donation to the church of Beaulieu, with the consent of his brother John.

Transcripts in the BnF: MS Français 20690, fol. 195, and Duchesne 76, fol. 91(v).

- 2 c.1201–1243. John is referred to in various *Feoda Campanie* (nos. III–VI).

Printed in *Documents relatifs au comté de Champagne et de Brie*, ed. Longnon, I, 94–180.

- 3 August 1208. John, count of Brienne, confirms a donation to the Church of St Peter of Troyes, made by his ‘dearest kinsman and *fidelis*’, Erard of Brienne [of Ramerupt].

Printed in *Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes*, ed. Lalore, V, no. 123.

- 4 Brevonne, June 1210. John, count of Brienne, confirms a donation made by his now deceased brother, Count Walter [III] of Brienne, to the monastery of Montiéramey, with the additional condition that the monks must remember and observe John’s own *anniversarium*.

Transcript in the BnF, Duchesne 21, fol. 4. The gist of the contents is confirmed in Nouv. Acq. Fr. 5598, fol. 93, and in the *Collection de Champagne*, vol. 139, fol. 331, both also in the BnF.

- 5 Compiègne, July 1214. The French king, Philip [Augustus], notifies the master of the Temple that he and his heir, Louis, have affirmed, in the presence of King John of Jerusalem, that they will not hear any case brought against Theobald [IV] of Champagne until the latter is twenty-one.

Printed in *Recueil des actes de Philippe Auguste*, ed. Delaborde *et al.*, III, no. 1338; and in *Littere Baronum: the Earliest Cartulary of the Counts of Champagne*, ed. Evergates, no. *88.

- 6 Compiègne, March 1215 ['anno 1214, mense Martio']. The heir to the French crown, Louis, confirms the affirmation above [no. 5] to his 'most excellent and dearest kinsman', King John of Jerusalem. Louis adds that the French monarchy is strongly against any possible marriage between Erard of Ramerupt and Philippa of Champagne – a marriage that would, in any case, be unlawful.

Printed in *PL*, ed. Migne, CCXVI, cols. 975–6 (no. 4); in *Layettes du Trésor des chartes*, ed. Teulet *et al.*, I, no. 1100; and most recently in *The Cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne*, ed. Evergates, no. 12.

- 7 [Damietta], 12 November 1219. John, king of Jerusalem, describes the events of the [Fifth] Crusade so far to the Emperor-elect Frederick [II], and asks for his aid and assistance.

See above, 105–9, and Appendix 2, below.

- 8 Tonnerre, June 1223. John, king of Jerusalem, makes peace in a highly complex dispute between his 'dearest kinsmen', Countess Matilda of Nevers and Erard of Chacenay.

Transcript in the BnF, Baluze 74, fol. 407(r), also labelled fol. 413.

- 9 Arras, 25 September [surely 1223]. John, king of Jerusalem, writes to King Henry [III] of England, asking Henry to take special care of his envoy, J[ohn] Forestier, who has enemies there.

Printed in *Diplomatic Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office*, I, ed. Chaplais, no. 122.

- 10 16 November 1223. A quitclaim involving Canterbury Cathedral priory is dated 'the Thursday next after St Martin's Day, following the first arrival of John, king of Jerusalem, in England'.

The original is in Canterbury Cathedral Archives, MS Chartae Antiquae G98 (previously recorded as G28 and G90).

- 11 January 1224 ['1223 m. Jan.']. John, king of Jerusalem, makes peace between his 'dearest kinsman', Erard of Brienne [of Ramerupt], and Abbot Albert of Vaultuisant.

Note in the BnF, Lat. 5468, fol. 141(r).

- 12 January 1224 ['1223 mense januario']. Walter [IV], lord of Brienne, confirms a donation made by several of his predecessors to the Order of Fontevraud – a donation that John, as count, had both confirmed and increased.

Transcript in the BnF, Lat. 5480, fol. 433(r).

- 13 [Late 1228 or 1229?] In a transaction involving Perugia, Peter of Altomanno is named as King John's 'vicar' [there].

Fragment printed in *Codice diplomatico del comune di Perugia: periodo consolare e podestarile (1139–1254)*, ed. Bartoli Langeli, I, no. 111*.

This volume contains several other transcripts that also refer to John in passing.

- 14 Clisson, 30 May 1230. John, king of Jerusalem, the archbishop of Sens, the bishop of Chartres and Count Theobald [IV] of Champagne declare that the French king, Louis [IX], has sworn to observe the peace terms agreed between himself and Hugh [X] of Lusignan, count of La Marche and Angoulême.

Transcript in the Archives nationales (France), KK 1064, fol. 272v; also in the BnF, Duchesne 76, fol. 103. Noted by d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et des comtes de Champagne*, V, no. 203.

Appendix 2 King John's letter to the emperor-elect Frederick II, 12 November 1219

Two versions of this letter have survived, which have been labelled 'Paris' and 'Innsbruck', on the basis of where they have come from. Paris is the better of the two, as the 'basic' text.¹ So what follows is the text and a translation of the Paris version: MS Lat. 11900, fol. 129. The Innsbruck version will soon be published too, as part of the *MGH* series, by Professor Josef Riedmann. I would like to thank him again, here, for all that he has done to assist me with these texts.

Excellentissimo ac dilectissimo domino F. dei gratia Romanorum Regi semper Augusto et Regi Siciliae; I. eadem gratia Hierosolymitanus Rex salutem in eo qui dat salutem Regibus. Novit vestra dominatio a prudentibus viris saepius fuisse consultum, et in sancto Lateranensi Concilio fuisse approbatum, quod per invasionem Regni Babyloniae terra sancta posset facilius a manibus infidelium liberari. Nos autem ad ejusdem terrae liberationem modis omnibus intendentes, relicto Regno nostro, licet ad damnum et detrimentum omnium reddituum nostrorum, hoc opus aggredi non dubitavimus, de divino et vestro subsidio confidentes. Sicut enim audivit Excellentia vestra, in primis applicavimus ante Damiatam qua hostes Christi castellum montis Tabor subverterunt, et castellum Planentiu [²] et alia loca in Regno Hierosolymitano, quod est valde bonum principium ad recuperationem terrae Sanctae. Haec et alia commoda venerunt inde hac occasione prout scis. Postquam [*editing hand adds here: vero fluvium transivimus de quo audistis et civitatem*³] undique obsedimus, subverterunt Civitatem sanctam Hierusalem. Verum ea quae nobis obtulerunt nomine Treugarum antequam expugnata esset civitas, per latorem praesentium et multos ad vos transeuntes plenius audietis. Tamen ea nihilominus vobis per praesentes litteras declaramus. Obtulerunt etiam nobis quod redderent si vellemus pretiosum lignum Christi et Totum Regnum

¹ See above, 106.

² According to Riedmann's transcription, the Innsbruck version says 'Palmeanum' here (Palmyra?). But the likeliest candidate is surely Banyas, sometimes rendered 'Paneas', which we know was destroyed at around this time. See D. Pringle, *Secular Buildings in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: An Archaeological Gazetteer* (Cambridge, 1997), no. 42; and Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la cinquième croisade*, 138.

³ This 'added' section is almost identical to a similar passage found in the main text of the Innsbruck version. We may therefore accept the added section as a genuine part of the original letter.

Hierosolymitanu, exceptis duobis castris Circo videlicet Ipreserasence [⁴], et ex eis tributum reddere promittebant. Redderent similiter omnes captivos qui in duobus Regnis detinentur, Syriaco videlicet et Damasceno [*sic?*⁵]. Praeterea dare volebant pecuniam ad reedificandam sanctam civitatem Hierusalem. In hoc tandem nostri convenerunt, quod primum civitas expugnaretur. Licet hoc opus causa liberationis Terrae Sanctae fuerit inchoatum, et omnium Cruce – signatorum intentio talis fuit. Contigit enim, quod auxiliante divina potentia civitatem Damiatam expugnativimus tertia feria proxima post festum omnium Sanctorum ad Laudem et gloriam nominis Christi. Modum autem ex processum⁶ [*rei latorem?*⁷] Dominationi vestrae supplicavimus, ut nos et Terram sanctam habeatis propentius comendatos ad ejusdem terrae liberationem intendentes cum festinatione, prout vestra nobilitas noverit expedire. Datum secundo Idus Novembris.⁸

Translation

To the most excellent and dearest lord F., by the grace of God king of the Romans, *semper augustus* and king of Sicily; from J., by the same grace king of Jerusalem, greetings in Him who gives salvation to kings. Your lordship knows that prudent men have very often advised, and the holy Lateran council agreed, that through an invasion of the kingdom of Egypt, the Holy Land might be more easily liberated from infidel hands. We indeed, intending to free this land by all means, left our kingdom, although this involved suffering great damage and detriment to all our revenue; yet we did not hesitate to begin this work, trusting in divine help and yours. As your lordship has heard, when first we came before Damietta, the enemies of Christ destroyed the castle of Mount Tabor, and the castle of [*name not clear*⁹], and other places in the kingdom of Jerusalem, which represents a very good starting point from which to recover the Holy Land. These and other benefits came from there at that time, just as you know. After [*editing hand adds: 'we crossed the river of which you have heard, and besieged the city' – that is, Damietta*] on every side, they destroyed the holy city of Jerusalem. Indeed, you will hear through the bearer of this letter, and from many that are on their way to you, concerning the

⁴ It is noted, alongside the Paris text, that the two castles mentioned here are Kerak and Montréal, and this is confirmed by the Innsbruck version, which says 'Craco et Petrensi' (Kerak and the castle of Petra – i.e. Montréal). The basic identification of the castles in question, as Kerak and Montréal, is confirmed in many other sources; we can be certain that this is correct.

⁵ The Latins tended to regard the Ayyubids as having two 'kingdoms', namely Egypt and Syria/Damascus. So this, surely, is what our author really meant to write. In the Innsbruck version, we find 'Egyptiaco et Damasceno'.

⁶ It is at this point that the Paris and Innsbruck versions begin to diverge dramatically. Here is the start of a long interpolated section, which continues until the end of the Innsbruck text. See above, 106.

⁷ The next few words after 'processum', in the Paris text, are extremely hard to make out. The suggestions here make sense in context, and bear a marked resemblance to what the transcript appears to say, before the text becomes clear again at 'Dominationi'.

⁸ Only the Paris text ends formally, with a dating clause (Innsbruck is off in its interpolation). We should accept the Paris dating clause as correct, and the Paris conclusion as the 'true' ending of the letter (see above, 106).

⁹ See above, footnote 2.

truce that they offered to us, before that city [*Damietta*] was conquered. Nonetheless, these [*terms*] we declare to you in this letter. They offered us, if we wished, the precious True Cross and the whole kingdom of Jerusalem, except the two castles of [*Kerak and Montréal*], for which they promised to pay a tribute. They would likewise return all the captives that they hold in their two kingdoms, that is Syria and Damascus [*sic*;¹⁰ *'Egypt and Syria/Damascus' is surely what is meant*]. Moreover, they would give us money for the rebuilding of the holy city of Jerusalem. We convened regarding this matter when first the city [*Damietta*] was ready for the taking. [*Yet*] this undertaking to free the Holy Land had only just begun, and such was the intention of all the crusaders. So it came to pass that, with the aid of divine power, we took the city of Damietta on the third day following the feast of All Saints [*4 November*], to the praise and glory of the name of Christ. For just as the bearer of this letter will report on the progress of these things [*? – text not clear*], we beg your lordship that you keep us, and the Holy Land, closely commended to you, as we intend to free it speedily, just as you know. Dated the second of the Ides of November [*12 November*].¹¹

¹⁰ See above, footnote 5.

¹¹ I would like to thank Dr Ida Toth for all her assistance in preparing the above text and translation.

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UNPUBLISHED PAPERS AND THESES

- Edbury, P. W., 'Ernoul and the continuations of William of Tyre: approaches and implications' (paper delivered at Oxford, 7 February 2011).
- 'Ernoul, Eracles and the Fifth Crusade' (paper delivered at Canterbury, 13 April 2012).
- Hamilton, B., 'The impact of Prester John on the Fifth Crusade' (paper delivered at Canterbury, 14 April 2012).
- Murray, A. V., 'The place of Egypt in the strategic thinking of the crusades, 1099–1221' (paper delivered at Canterbury, 13 April 2012).
- Perry, G., 'The career and significance of John of Brienne, king of Jerusalem, emperor of Constantinople' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2010).
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